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by Lauran Paine

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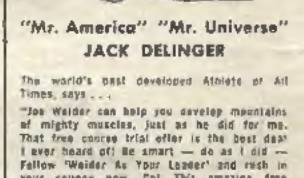

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Evan Morley was determind to clean up Deming and preach the Gospel— but he was going about it in the wrong way.

2. THE DEADLY SLOWPOKE (Lee Winters story) ..... Lon Williams 22
Why should a man go around acting like a dog or a sheep?

3. CLEM GILMORE'S WAR ..... Glen Monroe 33
As a cavalryman, it was Gilmore's duty to fight the redskins, but he had a personal and private feud with an officer, over a horse.

4. THE FIRST TRAIN ROBBERY ..... J. J. Mathews 39
Can you guess the year in which it took place?

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7. TEXAS' STRANGE CIVIL WAR BATTLE ..... Lawrence Hunnicutt 57
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Anson Graves' newspaper crusade had only one possible ending, Larry Polk figured. Graves would join the list of Boss Logan's victims.

ROBERT A. W. LOWNDES, *Editor* MARIE ANTOINETTE PARK, *Asso. Ed.*

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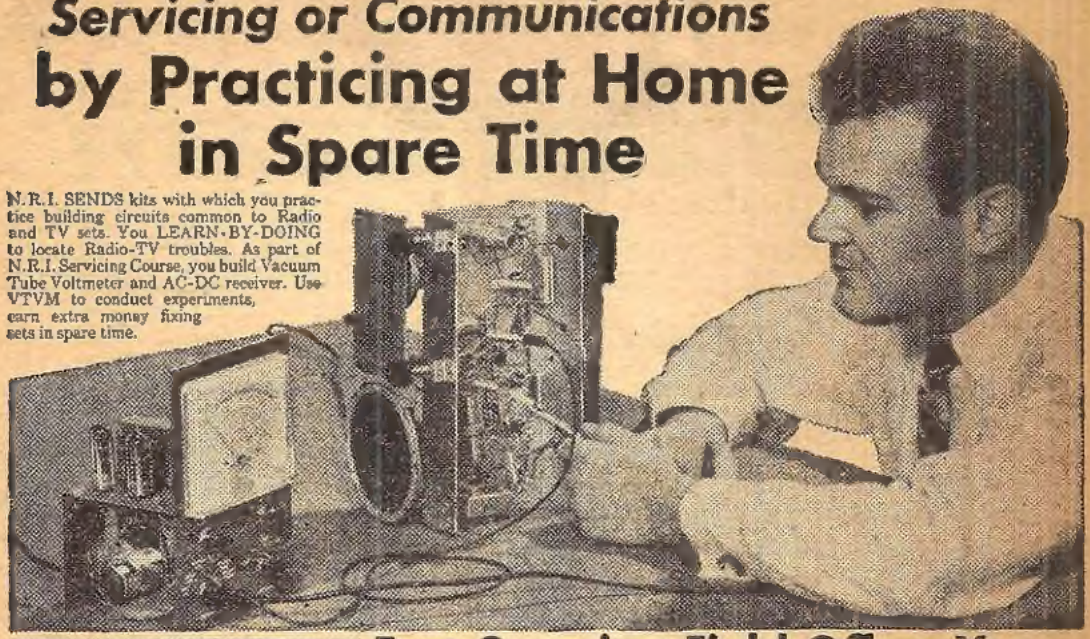

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"Sullivan's got a right to stop you from using his saloon for a recruiting ground, Morley, and my job is to protect everybody's legal rights—saints and sinners alike. Your part, Evan, should be to labor for something we've never had—Deming's first church!"

GUNS OF WRATH

Complete Helltown Novelet

by Lauran Paine

MORLEY swung down the roadway in the dusk, the sullen fire in his green eyes lashing out at the indifferent little town of Deming, with its wildness and tawdriness. There was also its endless hitchrails filled with sleepy, patient horses and its rolling riders afoot, swaggering along the duckboards, spurs jingling merrily in the semi-gloom of sundown.

He tied his horse to an old ring bolted to the north side of Levin's Emporium, at the far end of Deming, and loosened the cinch a little. He patted the animal's rawboned rump, stalked through the dust until he came to the edge of the plankwalk, and stepped up onto it like a man floundering in deep water. There he began a measured, purposeful gait that would take him into oblivion, at the other end of town, unless another man went there instead.

Morley was rawboned, like his horse, and tall. There was a hawkishness to his face, where the weathered hide was stretched unbecomingly over the flat bone beneath. His mouth was too long, and no more than a bloodline, like a saber slash, in the granite of his jaw. But the most unique part of him was the green eyes that brooded constantly, and mirrored the corrosive fires that drove and consumed him. Evan Morley was a man shunned by the reckless cowboys of the great range and the staid, settled citizens of Deming alike.

If the turmoil within him was destined to drive him relentlessly in his avowed purpose to "carry the word", Deming shrugged and the cowboys smiled; but neither wanted to be proselytized or destroyed, nor saved, by the pent up violence in Evan Morley. If he was inspired by the same—some said "reincarnated"—spirit that had led John Brown, then he must be encouraged to go the full distance alone.

Morley's great guns, two of them, hung menacingly from his slab hips. His aura of religion met its environ-

Beery didn't draw—he just slapped the gunsel.

ment on common ground, and faced it there, unflinchingly. "The word" would be spread; by humble and prayerful means if possible—but it would be spread!

He didn't see the startled glances that looked into his forbidding face, nor the uneasy nods that wavered past as he stalked through town. He felt, rather than noticed, the groups of hilarious half-drunk cowboys who whooped through Deming. Saturday night, to Evan Morley, was a time for soul-searching—a time of preparation for the greatness of the Sabbath.

As he walked past the ebb and flow of masculine humanity—with its occasional sprinkling of sequined women, squealing and rebuking their tanned companions—his eyes burned with hell's own fire.

The *Golden Slipper Saloon* had long defied him, and shrugged at his warnings to turn from the path of sin, especially on Sunday. Now the anger of retribution was bearing down, fully prepared, in the denunciations of "the word", and the more respected messengers of Samuel Colt's design, to breathe the flames of Sodom and Gomorrah upon it.

THE *GOLDEN SLIPPER* was gaudy and plush, with a great backbar painting of a nude Venus reclining on a scarlet couch. She was queen and arbiter over the sweating, red-faced and loud-mouthed clutch of humanity that roiled beneath her. She was also the favorite of Laertes Sullivan, the saloon's owner—a powerful man with a bloated, splotchy face and small blue eyes the color of sun bleached china.

Sullivan wasn't alone in rapturous

adoration of Venus' prodigious dimensions and pink flesh. There were many others, among them a lean-hipped, hard-eyed man known as the Tomahawk Kid. He was impassive, taciturn, and given to great amounts of fiery liquor, said by some to palliate the awful screams and moans that haunted his nights. The Tomahawk Kid drank, usually alone, every night he spent in Deming, in the *Golden Slipper*.

Not so enamoured with the "Pink Lady", called thus because her creater had passed on before he could name her, was Powell Beery, marshal of Deming. Beery was a stalwart man with a brittle stare and a violent temper which was, some way, mixed up with incredible courage. The combination had given him a reputation that inspired respect among the most irresponsible plainsmen, drovers and cowboys, that took down their hair in Deming.

Laertes Sullivan had many sidekicks, and one scuttled in with the news of the approach of Evan Morely, when the latter was five doors down. Sullivan waved to the bartender nearest him, tossed his head toward the messenger, then edged his way to the side of Powell Beery.

"That damn fool of a Morley's on his way here."

Beery nodded matter-of-factly. "That's no surprise, is it?"

"No." Sullivan spat out around his soggy cigar. "But I ain't holding still for no more of his monkeyshines in the *'Slipper.*" His blue eyes braced the marshal defiantly. "If he causes trouble, Powell, I'll have him run out of town on a rail."

The marshal hadn't looked at Sullivan until then. Berry turned and smiled coldly. "Sullivan, you got your rights just like any other merchant; but that's all you got."

"What are you talking about? I don't tolerate no brawls in the *'Slipper*. I got a lot of money in this place."

"Sure you have," the marshal said. "And you get lawful protection, too, just like anybody else. But I get awfully tired of standing around in here every Saturday night, just protecting your interests, too." Beery wagged his head. "You don't pay my wages, any more than Clavenger or Peters or Levin, so why in hell do you expect more protection?" He didn't let the bar owner answer. "And furthermore, when you talk about running someone out of town on a rail, step easy, Sullivan. You may be big in Deming, but don't get an idea you're *that* big, or you'll get whittled down."

Laertes Sullivan's splotchy face purpled. "Powell, as president of the town council. . ."

"Yeah. As president of the town council, you can get my badge." He turned away, so the flames in his eyes wouldn't show, and looked up at the Pink Lady. "Go ahead, Sullivan. I'd thank you for that, and so would the Tomahawk Kid; I expect he's always wanted to wear a legal badge of some kind."

SULLIVAN didn't answer. His glance flickered past Beery to where the Kid, tight-lipped and big-eyed as usual, was standing alone at the far end of the bar. Powell Beery knew that the Kid was in Sullivan's employ now and then, but he had guessed wrong. If ever there was a man on earth with a built-in, rabid, hatred of the law, its badges and power, it was the Tomahawk Kid. The Kid sucked dark, oily liquid from the splayed stalk of his cigar and swallowed it as he turned away from the marshal.

"Just remember what I said, Marshal. If that maniac comes in here to raise his religious hell, I'll toss him out on his ear."

Powell Beery smiled dourly to himself. Sullivan wouldn't touch Evan Morley; he'd have a hireling flunky do it. Not that the marshal thought Sullivan was afraid of Morley, or any

one else; but he knew how Morley usually awed folks, too. He stared into the backbar mirror and studied the narrow, thin-chested Kid at the end of the bar. Maybe Sullivan'd have the Kid jump Morley. Well, that wouldn't take long. Evan was said to be fast with a gun, but no one in their right mind would class him with the Tomahawk Kid. Even and inspired fanatic like Morley needed more than prayer and faith to beat the Kid.

Morley's bony shoulders struck the louvered doors with a crash. He jostled startled "sinners" in his path and the mighty clamor of his deep voice—bell-like, clear and rumbling deep within his great chest—rolled out over the babel of the *Golden Slipper.*

"Repent! Repent, ye sinners. Grovel in the slime of your vices! Get thee hence from the iniquitous den of the *Golden Slipper!* Go forth to your homes, ye vile, unclean hounds; spawn of Satan's witches; go forth!"

A drunken cowboy with fiery red whiskers over his sweaty jowls, turned to a companion. "Did—did he call us what I think he did, pardner?"

The other man shrugged, neither impressed or angered. He'd been called similar—and worse—many times, and had long since come to accept such nomenclature as commonplace. "Hell," he said thickly, "how should I know? Never coulc' understand him."

Morley kicked a table, laden with cards and chips, out of his path with one heavily booted and spurred foot, until he stood alone in a circle of light in the middle of the room. His green eyes blazed frighteningly, and his bloodless line of a mouth was damp at the outer edges with spittle.

"The hour of visitation is at hand! Go thee hence; seek each of you the other, and confess, for your soul's salvation. Rend your garments and rub the ashes of your wickedness into your faces, and stand up to your Maker. Leave this vice-stinking air of the *Golden Slipper.*"

Beery tossed a quick look at Sullivan, who was standing—scarlet faced and murderous—beside the Tomahawk Kid. Morley waved his long arms and raged, the fury of his words lashing the men into a silent awe. He heaped oaths upon them and literally spat at them, the fire in his mind consuming him as surely as though he were standing in flames.

Powell Beery, arms hooked by the elbows over the bartop, wondered at Morley's scorching madness. He dimly remembered hearing of another man—Savanarola, his name was—who was said to be a hell-and-brimstone preacher like old Morley. Then he caught sight of movement in the still, deathly silence of the smoky room, and turned his head a little. The Tomahawk Kid had come around the edge of the bar and was walking toward Morley. Beery's senses became acutely alert. He knew Sullivan had sent the Kid; the marshal turned casually, crossed glares with Sullivan, and spoke softly as the Kid went past. "Easy, Kid. Don't make any mistakes."

For a slight moment, the Kid hesitated and looked over at him. "He's armed, lawman; he's legal."

Beery nodded coldly. "Sure he is, Kid. But I'm the law here, not you."

The Kid's black eyes swung in indecision toward Sullivan. The *'Slipper's* owner came around the end of the bar with a curse. "Then throw the crazy fool out of here, Berry. I told you I won't stand for this. Throw him out of here, or I'll have the Kid do it."

Powell Beery's anger was solid in his throat. He jerked his head sideways. "Both of you get back to that bar, where you were, and don't make any faults." He was staring at the Kid when he said it, reading the hate in the black eyes correctly. "No mistakes at all, damn you; now get over there."

Sullivan glared at the Kid. "Come on," he said in a strangling voice. "Give him two minutes." They moved back and the fearful denunciations of Evan

Morley rang out over the still room again, lashing and exhorting and grisly.

Powell Beery didn't move away from the bar; in fact, his arms were still hooked akimbo over the bartop when he spoke. He had to wait for Morley's harangue to die down; then the marshal's words carried clearly in the stillness. "Morley, go outside and wait for me."

The big fanatic turned slowly and looked at him, the dampness at the corners of his wide mouth, damp and frothy. "Now, Powell, would you cross swords with the Lord? You, a protector of the weak; would you defend these swine slopping at the swill of Sullivan...?"

"Go outside, Morley; now!"

Each word was clipped off sharp, with an edge of latent violence laced into it. Evan Morley stopped suddenly, his glazed eyes reflecting the hazy lantern light. He stood rigidly erect, staring down at Beery.

The marshal's arms slid off the bar, but otherwise he didn't move; the authority in his eyes bored into the taller man. "I won't say it again, Morley. Go outside; now!"

Morley's forehead was shiny with sweat; his shoulders slumped, and the tension was broken. He turned and walked past the array of wide-eyed sinners and went out into the coolness of early evening.

EVAN MORLEY had been false to himself. He had intended wrecking Sullivan's *Golden Slipper*. He had meant to break the chairs and tables, shoot down the leering rows of liquor bottles, and then empty his guns into the famous Pink Lady, personification of evil in Deming, to him. The stars winked down, and blackness limned his great, gaunt figure; Morley felt the alkali of ashes in his entrails. He had not hewed to his purpose; Sullivan's house of infamy still stood and echoed with the cries of the depraved. He groped for the bench at the edge of the wall and slumped onto it, head down and dripping sweat from his zeal, onto the indifferent, scuffed old duckboards.

Powell Beery stood for a moment just outside the louvered doors of the *Golden Slipper* and breathed inwardly, deeply. His body shook off its sluggishness from breathing the foetid stink of the saloon. Then he looked down and saw the framework of Evan Morley, incongruously tall and gaunt, even in the soft, gentle benevolence of the shadows. He moved over toward it and sat down on the bench.

"Evan, there's a time and place for everything. Sullivan's saloon isn't the place for sermons."

Morley didn't look up. He was almost physically ill with the disappointment and disgrace at his own failure. "But Deming has no other place. No better place, Powell; the *Golden Slipper* has the sinners in it, always. More than any other place."

Powell's frown was more anxious than angry. "Yeah, I reckon you're right. But look, Evan; you're exerting your rights without accepting your responsibilities."

That brought the green eyes up sharp. "What do you mean?"

"That you have the right of free speech, Evan but that your responsibility to the community demands better behavior from you."

"Ah." It came out slowly, with hurt and indignation in it. "You're like the others, Powell; you think I'm crazy." He started to get up, but Beery's hand restrained him.

"No. Not crazy, Evan; overzealous, possibly, but not crazy." They sat in silence for a moment before Powell went on. "Deming is a cowtown, Evan. It's small and mean and dirty, with a lot of rough buildings and rougher inhabitants. That'll all change some day,

but it'll never change if you and the rest of us don't guide things right."

"I do my share, Powell; I carry the word of the Lord. I take. . "

"I reckon; but that's not what I mean. I mean your part in Deming should be to labor for something we have never had here. If Deming's to change, Evan, then somebody's got to help it. Each of us'll have a part. Your part is to give Deming its first church. You can't save the souls, Evan, without a place to do it in; and no matter how you'd like to use Sullivan's place for your recruiting ground, he's got the right to keep you from using it. So you've got to compete with him for those souls you want to save, by building your own place to do it in—Deming's first church, Evan."

Evan Morley's mind was slow to absorb what the marshal told him, but gradually the idea spread through him. It took hold of his imagination, and out of the context of his thoughts, came an inspired grin. He seized Beery's hand

Morley's mighty voice thundered over the noises of the night. "Powell Beery, you have been sent. You have spoken the message of my mission. You have been an instrument of the Lord." He was on his feet, pumping Powell's hand and dragging him off the bench. Beery felt the self-conscious blood come into his face and he saw the little knot of cowboys loom up out of the night to listen and watch. Then Morley left him, clumping south, back toward the darkened end of town where his horse waited, muttering to himself.

ONE OF THE half-drunk cowboys stepped up close to the marshal and grinned derisively, jerking his head toward Morley's back. "You got a message, Marshal? A damned good message a rider for the Rafter 7 can carry back to the poor, dumb cow brutes on the range, for the salvation of their souls?" The cowboys began to hoot and roar and slap the speaker on the back in appreciation of his heavy humor.

Beery squinted at the roisterers, unsmiling, then turned as a gentle hand brushed softly over his sleeve. The Tomahawk Kid was looking into his eyes mockingly.

"Yeah. Mister Marshal, you got a inspired message fer the sinners, have you? Something that'll help 'em into Heaven?"

It was a swishing blur of movement, and none of the crowd of cowboys saw it. But they all heard the sound of Beery's open hand when it struck the Kid's face, and they straightened up quickly, sobered and startled. The Tomahawk Kid was writhing on the ground, half on, half off, the splintery duckboards, and an awful silence held them all in its grip.

Powell's eyes were blazing a cold light when he stoped and yanked the Kid to his feet. "You'd better learn your place, Kid. I don't take any familiarity from your kind; don't ever forget it."

The Kid ran a long fingered hand over his thin, pointed jaw and glared unleashed wrath at the marshal. They were almost buckle to buckle as Powell released his hold on the Kid's shirt front. The words didn't carry far, but enough men heard them to carry them over the land and through the town within a matter of a few hours.

"I'll kill you for that, Beery! I'll shoot your guts out for that!"

Then the Kid jerked out of the lawman's presence and disappeared behind the louvered doors of the *Golden Slipper*. Powell glared at the rigid crowd of men in front of him. Bleary eyes were watching him like wary rabbits. He swore at them, shoved a path through their ranks, and went to the small office the city had built for its law officer.

- 2 -

SULLIVAN'S laughter boomed through the smoky dungeon of his *Golden Slipper*. He threw his head back, roared into the state air until his eyes watered, then choked back the rush of noise and let air escape from his lungs with a sibilant sound. His small eyes looked balefully at Horace Brown, the bartender who told him of Morley's request for funds to build a church.

"Why. . .the crazy skunk. He comes storming in here last night and raises hell; then he's got the guts to come sneaking and slinking back in here today for a donation."

"No," Brown said, "it wasn't like that. He nailed me on the road and asked me, personal, for a contribution. He was holding that beat-up old Stetson of his and begging off folks on the plankwalk. I was walking to work; he didn't come in here." Brown shook his head. "He didn't mention you at all."

Brown's elaboration of what had happened didn't detract from Sullivan's contempt. It boiled in him and showed in his face. "The damned louse! He'd better not try and get money in here!"

He leaned toward Brown. "And that's only part of it, Horace; I'm going to make it my business to see that he don't build no church in Deming, either." He turned away abruptly, a streamer of bile eddying back over his shoulders. "He's been bothering me too damned long. I've had enough. I'll show him—and Deming, too—what happens to men who cross Sullivan." He suddenly recalled something else. "And that goes for Morley's protector, Powell Beery."

Sullivan didn't see the preoccupied look on his bartender's face, and he had no way of knowing that Brown's ten-dollar contribution lay crumpled, and smelling of whiskey, on the pile of crumpled money in Morley's hat. He slammed into his office and looked at the thin form of the solitaire player across the room from his desk. He nodded to himself before he spoke.

"All right, Kid. I take the wraps off'n you. You wanted to kill him; well. . . I didn't think it was good business, that night. Now I say, go ahead. Gut-shoot him. Him and Morley been baiting me long enough; I'll show them the kind of power they're bucking!"

The Tomahawk Kid raised his eyes in surprise. "What in hell's got into you. Morley again? Or is it Beery this time?"

"Nothing's got into me. You wanted to kill Beery; all right, get him. I'll give you the bonus. Beery first, then Morley. Build a church, will he? Well ...I don't care that," he snapped his thick fingers harshly," for his damned church. But if he can't build it, it'll break his heart. So while you're gunning Beery, I'll be laughing at Morley's defunct church plans."

Sullivan sank down behind his desk breathing heavily.

THE KID thoughtfully laid aside his cards and smiled. "I'll call Beery in front of the whole damned town. They respect him so much. . . . I'll make him crawl in front of 'em like a dog." He let the exultation blossom inside his head. "I'll make him lick my boots, like a damned puppy; then I'll kill him." He got up and walked to the door of Sullivan's office. "I'll like that."

Sullivan watched him go out of the room, and licked a fresh cigar, clamped his teeth around it. No one crossed Laertes Sullivan; no living man!

Powell heard the rumor that the Tomahawk Kid was going to gun him when next they met. He was at Clavenger's Forge, getting his big bay horse shod, when he heard it. He knew it was

common knowledge, too, the way the men looked at him. A sunburst of anger exploded down inside of him. He didn't regret slapping the Kid publicly, but he han't thought too much, then, of the consequences. Now he was face-to-face with them; and while his temper raged and roared through him, the back of his throat was dry, too.

Morley was in Levin's Emporium, his wild eyes beaming, coaxing contributions, when he heard the whisper of the impending death of a man. One of two men. This was something Evan Morley understood very well, although Deming didn't know it. He put the brimful hat on the counter and lowered his shaggy eyebrows. Julius Levin looked at him askance. He was afraid that one of those booming sermons was about to drive out his customers; but, being a descreet man, he confined his groans to himself.

Morley buttonholed the gossiper who carried the news. "How do you know this, brother?" he asked softly.

The cowboy shrugged uncomfortably. "The whole damned town knows it. The Kid is making his brag in every saloon in town; he's as good as calling the marshal. It's only a matter of time before Beery hears it. Ain't neither of them likely to slope or back down, to my mind."

Morley looked down at the rider for several seconds without speaking; then he walked over and picked up his hat, handed it to Levin and nodded toward it gently. "Julius, in this hat is the Lord's money. Do you reckon you could keep it in your strongbox for a while?"

Levin nodded, releived, and Morley dumped the money on the counter shaking every cent out of the folds and slamming the shapeless Stetson onto his head: "I'll be back for it, Julius—if the Lord so wills." Then he strode out of the store with wondering stares trailing in his wake.

"Wish I could advise you, Powell. Damned if I don't."

Beery shrugged. "Thanks, Merv, but all I ask is fair play."

"Yeah," said the blacksmith. "I hope to hell you get it."

"Merv, will you have my horse taken over to the barn and put up, when you're through with him?"

"Sure, Marshal; be glad to." The smith was old, but the ardor of his profession kept his hands and arms youthful and strong. Right then, his fingers were gripping the hammer tighter than usual; and his squinted eyes were brimming with the pathos of a man who has seen much violence and hated every bit of it.

Powell walked out of the shop, turned south, and headed up toward the center of town, his feet coming down flat on the duckboards and his arms swinging loose and easy. Up ahead, somewhere, was death, fortified with whiskey. He thought, oddly, that it wasn't fair at all; a man who lived according to the tenets of law and order, and decency as well, shouldn't be subjected to the savagery of every two-bit gunman who roamed the frontier. Then he remembered that such was what he had accepted the day he pinned on the marshal's badge. His mouth flattened back against his teeth, making the flesh above his lips white, in contrast to the tanned flesh of his cheeks and stubborn chin.

DEMING had been shocked twice in one day. First, Evan Morley's request for funds to build his church, had come as a total surprise. Not that most of the folks didn't admire the idea; they did. But it hadn't even gotten to the rumor stage before old Morley was dunning them. Then Powell Beery was being called by the Tomahawk Kid. That was startling, for, while everyone recognized the Kid's calling in his manner, he had never before done anything worse than hang around the *Golden Slipper* and drink in silence.

. Speculation was rife, and tension mounted. The word of Beery's coming from the north end of town spread like fire. Trade continued, but in a hushed, fraught manner. Conversations were short and eyes watchful; but rarely was the actual forthcoming battle discussed, except down by the liverybarn.

The Kid was in Martin's *Golden Nugget*, a third-class saloon, not in his usual place at the *Slipper*, when he was told of Powell Beery's coming. He looked at the informant with brilliantly sparkling eyes, and smiled.

"Have a drink, friend." He nodded to the bartender, who set another glass beside the bottle in front of the Kid. The man poured himself a stiff shot, feeling the need for it, and gulped it down. The Kid watched in fascinated silence, then nodded encouragement. "Another one." The man complied, getting a little sicker-looking with each passing moment.

The Kid tossed off his own drink automatically, and stroked the butts of his guns. "I've got a friend," he said dreamily, still beaming on the frightened, uneasy toadie. "I'm going to tell you a story, amigo. You never heard one like it before." He ducked his h ad toward the whiskey bottle again. "Help yourself."

The man shook his head with a wry smile, and the Kid shrugged tolerantly. "All right, amigo; later." He looked away. "There was a kid who fell out of an emigrant wagon, see: He was a little gaffer, even for a kid, and couldn't talk real good. This happened a long time ago. He was just a baby, sort of. It didn't happen in Deming—it was in the Territory, all right, but not in Deming."

The Kid poured a shot but didn't drink it; he just closed and opened his fingers around the glass, and talked. "'S'funny the emigrants never come back for the kid, ain't it? But they didn't. Maybe they had enough kids. Maybe they didn't like the little guy. It must've been something like that, don't you reckon? Most folks'd hunt high and low for a lost kid in the middle of nowhere, wouldn't they?"

The man nodded; he was beginning to sweat profusely, knowing that at any minute Powell Beery might stroll in. The Kid clasped and unclasped the shot glass. "Well...they never come back, anyway. Some old woman found the kid and fed him and worked the tail off him; then pretty soon a sodbuster got him. A damned squatter."

Contempt dripped from the word. "A farmer, mind you; and this sodbuster, he used to set this little kid to walking behind a sore-backed pair of old mules, one foot in the furrow, one foot on solid ground until the kid was so weak and wore out he'd drop. Then the sodbuster'd take the lines and whip the kid, see? Whip him with them thick black lines until he was screeching fit to die. That was bad, wasn't it? Beating a kid no more'n six years old like that. Man like that hadn't ought to live, had he?"

The man shook his head and the Kid smiled at him. "Damn; it's good having a friend, amigo. Well...the skunk didn't live. The kid was so beat up one day he wanted to die; so he took down the sodbuster's old rifle and tried to get the barrel end into his mouth and his toe on the trigger. Tha damned old gun was too long; his toe wouldn't reach. He was turning the gun around, trying to figure a way to get the thing to go off, when in comes this sodbuster."

A man poked his head past the louvered doors of the *Golden Nugget*, looked startled at the Kid's hunched over frame among the silent watchers, relaxed and genial, and ducked out again. But the Kid's friend had read the news of Beery's nearness in the man's face and squirmed.

THE KID looked at his friend, still smiling. "The sodbuster seen the kid with his old gun—which wasn't worth three dollars, Mex—and took

off his belt, cussing the kid for daring to touch the thing. The kid was little, remember, and packing a lot of scars from that same belt; and he was scared, too. Scared damned near to death. He pointed the gun at this farmer and began to cry then, by gawd, he must of squeezed the trigger...for all of a sudden, there's that damned farmer lying on the floor, kicking like a dead doe with his guts half out of him. The kid seen what he'd done and run out of the soddy, saddled the sodbuster's old horse and rode like the devil was after him." The Tomahawk Kid's head came around, his brilliantly dilated eyes fixing themselves on his friend. "Some story, ain't it"

The cadger nodded vigorously, suffused with warm indignation and hot liquor. "Gawd, yes. The kid done right." He swallowed and turned away in desperation. "I gotta go, Kid. G'luck."

He walked quickly out of the saloon, the sardonic faces of the silent spectators at the *Golden Nugget* following him with almost tangible contempt. The Kid watched him go and the haunted look came back into his eyes. He sighed and turned back to the solemn bartender.

"All right, old bronc; here's your money." He flipped two small pieces of gold on the counter. "I had a friend for a while, but the Tomahawk Kid never keeps 'em long...and he don't give a goddam, either."

He looked at the gold pieces for a moment, then a sudden inspiration made him fish out two more and place them carefully beside the other two. "Use 'em to buy a headstone, barkeep, for one of us who won't be around long, after I walk out of here. Understand?" The barman nodded and the Kid turned and walked toward the door as steady as when he had come in.

The lowing of insistent cattle in the loading chutes, down by the railroad yard, floated uptown. A little of the odor came, too, but wasn't offensive. Powell heard the lowing and tabulated it as the lowing of old cows who wanted to go back to their calves but never would. He kept on walking, eyes ahead, not narrowed at all, but never still, flicking here and there, searching for an attack that might take place at any instant. His breathing was even, and his pulse was slowed. Every sense was doubly sharpened and acute. Energy radiated from him in waves, and bile seeped steadily into his stomach. He walked forward on the deserted duckboards, then stopped stock still.

The Tomahawk Kid wasn't swaggering when he came out of the *Golden Nugget*, but he wasn't afraid either. The little kid who had been abandoned by the emigrants had come a long way since he had killed the sodbuster in the squalor of that soddy, years before. The conscience had been burned out of him; there was no longer anything left but the momentary exhiliration to be found behind his coughing, bucking guns.

He looked up and down the duckboards, saw Powell Beery coming toward him, and smiled sardonically. Drygulching was all right when no honor or prestige was involved, when it was simply a case of a job being done for money. But with Beery it was different. To kill him fairly would add notoriety to the Tomahawk Kid's already famous guns. He had no doubt in the world of the outcome of this duel. With a genuine smile, he stepped off the duckboards and walked leisurely into the middle of the deserted roadway. He saw Beery stop and watch him.

The Kid felt a thrill run through him. Deming was as hushed as a ghost town. There were hundreds of unblinking eyes peeping out at him, and he liked that, too; the Tomahawk Kid held the stage, and they were watching him with dread.

BEERY WAS close now. Not more than one-hundred feet separated them when the marshal stopped walk-

ing and stood, legs a little apart, like a man in a trance. The Kid let the breath out of his lungs, drew in a fresh supply and tasted the raw whiskey in the lining of his mouth. He smiled affably enough.

"Remember what I told you, Marshal, the night you hit me?" Beery didn't reply and the Kid didn't wait for it. "You didn't have to do that, Beery; you didn't use your head that night." Oddly there was a tremor, in his voice as though he wanted to hear Beery apologize so he wouldn't have to kill him. "Well...the Tomahawk Kid keeps his word, Marshal." He paused. "Got anything to say?"

Powell Beery's mind was rigid with the concentration of his purpose. He kept his jaws locked and stared at the Kid; he wouldn't waste one iota of energy, nor be diverted from his intention.

The Kid stared at him and read the inflexible will in the lawman's face. A premonition swept over him and he shrugged it off. He nodded ever so slightly and the word was almost a whisper when he said: "Draw!"

Deming held its breath; even the air was still. The Kid's hands moved in a blur that no one saw. Powell Beery's gun was coming up, even as its owner was taking slow steps sideways, like a crab, then the thunder blasted into the atmosphere with finality. It spanked the air and rode out over the still town with a blasphemous roar. The Kid fired twice, one shot from each gun. Beery's knees buckled and he went down, slowly, stubbornly, until he rested on his knees like a man bent in prayer. His gun flamed again, then again: three closely spaced shots.

The Kid's body jerked twice and his face showed an unnatural, horrified, look. He spread his legs a little wider in an effort to stay upright. His guns sagged from sheer, overpowering weight, until they hung at his sides.

Powell Beery's gun came up as inexorably as the one-eyed barrel of destiny and the Kid stared down into its maw and saw the portals of hell swing wide. He forced his guns to begin the climb back up from his sides; then Beery's gun mushroomed into a swollen, orange flame that blinded him. He felt the warmth of darkness spreading through him and succumbed to the peace of it. There was a face smiling down at him, then, and he recognized it instantly, although he couldn't recall ever seeing it before. It was a worn, pallid face, weary and toil worn. A woman's face. The resemblance was startling, even to the Tomahawk Kid. He smiled at it and a single word, like a sigh, came hushed from his mouth, where he lay in the fly-infested roadway of Deming.

"Mother." It was more reproof than acknowledgement.

People erupted from the stores and alleys and from behind doors. They ran yelling to one another and a mob of them hoisted Powell to his feet. Someone was slapping him on the back. The voices were strident and close and full of congratulations.

"You done it, Marshal. Deming's proud of you." "Congratulations, Beery; you was fine." "I just been over and kicked the skunk; he's plenty dead. There's a bucket of blood running out of his mouth and nose." "You must've shot him in the lights. Wished I'd had the chance, afore you got to him, Marshal. I'd a showed him, the whelp."

But someone was cutting away the soggy mass of his pants and he appreciated it after looking into the cowardly faces. He looked down and saw the widow Thompson, white as a sheet, saying nothing, but cleaning out the swollen, sullen, purplish flesh where the Kid's second shot had torn a ragged hole in his upper leg and knocked him to his knees.

"I don't know," Clavenger was saying at the inquest. "It's got me plumb

puzzled, but anyhow, it don't make much difference. Marshal Beery's two shots, one in the belly and one in the lights—er—high in the lungs, would've done it."

He sat down and looked helplessly at the room full of people. "I ain't got any ideas on who shot that .30-.30 slug into him, but she sure as hell broke a lot of ribs and tore his innards all to hell. Must have been someone standing close by." He licked his lips and frowned without saying more.

Deming was in accord with the blacksmith. Someone else had played a hand in the killing of the Tomahawk Kid. Even as Beery and the Kid were shooting it out, someone else had shot the Kid with a carbine. No one guessed who it was, or especially cared to know; the Kid was duly laid away, wrapped in an old army blanket, with his boots on. The bartender at the *Golden Nugget* sighed and pocketed the gold pieces. A dead man didn't need a headstone, anyway.

- 3 -

MORLEY'S INSISTENT dunning, backed by the wild fire of his green eyes, made Deming disgorge. Many of the cowmen and merchants gave so that they wouldn't be denounced by the sepulchre voice, that carried like thunder. In spite of the two guns old Morley carried, it just wasn't ethical, somehow, to stand up and call him when he was asking for money for his church. Especially since so many of the people had already contributed toward it, and no one really knew what the others thought of the idea, or what they'd think of anyone who bearded the fanatic.

He stumped through the town until the most zealous among them began to slide out of his path, half ashamed, half defiant. Then the *Golden Nugget* amid the good natured jeers of its patrons, put up a tin can labeled "Morley's Fund", and the idea spread until all Deming had "Morley Cans" as they were called. All, that is, except the *Golden Slipper*.

Powell Beery was still using his cane when he saw Evan bearing down on him. He leaned against the upright of his office and waited defensively.

"Powell, it's almost enough. D'you understand what that means?"

"I reckon." It was said laconically.

"The Lord giveth and he taketh away. How's your leg?"

"Fine. 'Be done with these damned canes in another few days."

"Powell?"

"Yes?"

"Do you recollect the saint who annointed your feet and assauged your pain, the widow Thompson?"

"Sure, Evan. I'm going to thank her as soon as I can walk that far."

"You aren't a humble man, sinner Beery." Morley's green eyes grew baleful. "She's a handsome woman, Powell; a handsome woman."

The marshal's eyes were narrowing slightly. "So I noticed, Evan."

"Then go thank her, ingrate, and look you close to her charms. She is a widow, Powell, and a good woman—and comely."

Powell smothered a desire to say "you damned fool" and only shrugged before he spoke. "I'll thank her right away. Thanks for reminding me. Say, when'll you have the money to build the church? The merchants and cattlemen are beginning to grumble about your everlasting harping for a share of every poker pot."

"I have enough now, brother, but I thought I'd wring out every penny I could. We'll need hymnals and choir robes and other trifles, too." A glint of un-angelic like humor shot into the green eyes. "I'll collect all the cans tomorrow and end the crusade."

WITH THE passing of the Tomahawk Kid, Laertes Sullivan seemed to draw within himself a little more, but only close observers—of which Deming had very few—noticed it. He stood in his usual place at the side of the bar and watched the sweaty, roistering cowboys and drovers, rarely speaking unless spoken to, never smiling. The Pink Lady looked down as always at the odoriferous mob of drinkers and gamblers, serene and aloof in her voluptousness.

From the *Golden Slipper*, word went out furtively that two-thousand, gold, was waiting for any man who would care to earn it. Several local toughs came in, listened, and went away. Then strangers began to drift in; they, too, and shrugged out again, until a small man with thick red hair heard. Banked coals of hell's fire in his blue eyes, came and stayed. His companion was only slightly taller and a little younger. He, too, wore two guns.

Deming knew what was afoot before the marshal did. Sullivan's boiling antagonism had come out into the open. While the Tomahawk Kid might have called Powell Beery over the slap in the face, without Deming's sanction and encouraged in secret by Sullivan, these two gunmen were openly hired by the saloon keeper to kill the marshal. Deming again drew inward a little and walked quietly in the face of the coming storm.

The little red-headed killer made it a point to stand outside the *Golden Slipper*, sneeringly casual, where he leaned against the wall beside the old bench, and stared at the marshal's office. His companion would walk ten to fifteen feet farther south and lean against the wall where Sullivan's establishment abutted the stage office.

All Deming read the purpose and knew that, sooner or later, hell was going to break loose. Each afternoon at three o'clock, sidewalk traffic would become sluggish and the press of business drove only the very hardy to walk between the *Golden Slipper*, on one side of the road, and the marshal's office on the other side.

Powell Beery cursed to himself. He had deliberately let Sullivan bait him into this one; he should have called the man as soon as he was able, after killing Sullivan's gunman. Still, he hadn't really thought that Laertes Sullivan had put the Kid up to it; he felt almost certain that his own action in slapping the Kid's face had started it.

Now, he knew differently, knew now that Laertes Sullivan would try to destroy him if it cost him everything he had.

Strangely, almost psychically, Powell knew when the day arrived. He could sense it in himself, as much as in the mounting, stiff tension of the town. He was seething coldly and he told himself, whatever the odds, he was going to force a showdown. The gunmen took up their usual vigil under the wooden overhang in front of the *Golden Slipper*. He saw them saunter out, contemptuous of both the marshal and the town, and take up their places. Faces looked up at him in a blur as he walked slowly across the road, halted in the middle of it, faced up toward the cold-eyed gunmen, and shouted over the scuffling sounds of the traffic.

"Out in the road, damn you!"

There was no mistaking the meaning, or to whom it was addressed. The red-headed killer turned and spat out a word to his companion, pushed off the wall and nodded. "Finally got your guts up, eh, Marshal?"

The two men stepped down off the duckboards, their spurs ringing a knell that fell on a hushed town. People scurried like chipmunks. Powell's eyes were desperate. Against one, maybe, but only a fool would hope for survival against two gunmen. It might happen in stories, but not in life. He licked his lips and felt the same dryness he had noticed when he had gone against the Tomahawk Kid.

THEY WERE almost close enough then. The red-headed gunman stopped and took his stance. Powell stopped, too, hunched a trifle, but relaxed. Then the second, younger gunman stopped. His face was ashen and crawling with nerves. He darted a stabbing look at the red-head. Then, out of nowhere, striding with the mighty steps of a man fired with purpose and determination, his great growl of a voice thundering from the cube of his gaunt chest, Evan Morley came stalking out from between two shabby buildings and into the roadway. He turned and began his march toward the straining gun-fighters.

"The forces of evil are making their stand before the righteousness that is facing them in the midst of Deming. Hell's fire and damnation are opposing the structure the Lord, that is destined to arise out of the filth of this village, girded with the sword—and guns—of His might. Draw, foul fiends of Satan! Draw, damned imps from hell! The foul hole that spawned you is ready to take you back. Draw, damn you!"

The epithets rolled and echoed up and down the dusty roadway. The younger gunman was badly rattled by the wild, green-eyed apparition, but the red-head showed only a brief flash of surprise, then he went into action. Powell saw his mouth tighten, the eternal signal of humanity on the prod; and he, too, flared into the slashing draw that brought up his single gun in an arc of black-barreled, sudden death.

Morley had stopped walking. His green eyes were flashing in a taut face, and his booming voice roared over the carnage that ripped and tore along Deming's main roadway. "Vengeance is mine—*Brang!*—saith the Lord. He giveth—*Brang*—and he taketh away. He leadeth you into—*Brang*—green pastures. Amen!"

It was all over and Morley's "amen" was solemn. Powell turned and looked in awe at the smoking guns in the preacher's hands. Thin trickles of smoke licked upward from their snouts. He let his glance travel upwards to the wide, hectic fanaticism that shone out of the green eyes; then he turned and looked back at the two slumped bodies lying in the dust of the roadway. He holstered his gun and walked over to them. The younger man had a hole in his forehead, slightly off-center. He had never known what struck him.

Powell booted over the red-headed killer. The man's eyes were dimming but he was still alive. Three holes showed scarlet in his carcass. One in each breast and a third, lower, in his abdomen. The marshal knelt down and the glazing eyes turned toward him, trying to force the sardonic grin back up. "Can you hear me, Marshal?"

Beery bent lower. "Yes."

"You know who that man was, behind you? The preacher with the green eyes?"

Powell knew the gunman couldn't possibly have seen the color of Morley's eyes from where they had shot it out. "Evan Morley; a sort of preacher, here in Deming. 'You know him?"

THE KILLER'S eyes drifted past Powell and the marshal turned and saw the big, gaunt frame of the minister bending over his shoulder, tense and straining, the green eyes stricken-looking as they glared into the dying man's face. The gunman seemed to consider for a second; then his sardonic smile came and went suddenly and he tried to shrug. "No; can't say as I do," he said softly. Powell could feel the relief flood Morley's big frame and the deep, resonant voice boomed, hushed and grateful.

"I'll pray for you, brother. Evan Morley never forgets a kindness. The Lord taketh the strayed lambs into his fold, brother; amen."

Morley's last word escorted the gunman's spirit into the Hereafter, and Powell Beery stood up thoughtfully. He knew perfectly well that some-

where, Morley and the dead man had met. He also knew that Morley's blazing guns had more than evened the odds and that, if anything aside from luck, had spared him, it was those same guns. He turned, shoving his way past the throng of humanity who had come to stare at the dead men, and walked toward his office, his thoughts jumbled and churning under the impact of his revitalised bloodstream.

Morley followed Beery to his office. His green eyes were somber. Beery dropped down behind his desk and propped his head in his cupped hands. "I owed that to you, Powell."

"Like hell, Morley. You didn't owe me a thing."

"Yes I did. Remember when you told me Deming would become a great town and I had a part in its destiny?" Beery nodded wearily. "Well...brother... those were the first words anyone ever said to Evan Morley that meant he belonged in a good scheme of things. That he was a part of something, not just another drifter, afire with The Word. You put purpose where before there was only zeal. You steered me toward my goal of Deming's church, and I reckon that's the first worthwhile thing Evan Morley ever undertook." He let the green eyes roam over Powell's face. "Another thing, Powell."

"Yes?"

"The red-headed gunman; he deserves forgiveness, like all sinners."

"I reckon he does." Powell's head came up slowly. "Anyway, Morley, I'd just as soon never mention him again as long as I live."

Morely understood the marshal's promise. Whatever had been in his own past that the dying gunman had come so close to revealing, was forever locked into the damp earth. He nodded gently. "I thank you, Powell. I deeply thank you."

Powell watched the big frame walk out of the office, across the dusty, fly filled roadway, shouldering past awed bystanders, then he frowned slightly. Evan Morley was bearing down on the deserted splendor of the *Golden Slipper,* his big arms flapping awkwardly over the re-loaded guns.

Laertes Sullivan was standing beside his bar, a thin trickle of dark brown cigar juice dribbling from his mouth, when Evan Morley entered. The bartender walked discreetly away, but Morley's voice carried easily to every corner of the murky place.

"Sullivan! Your plans backfired. You sent out one imp and he was bested by the blinding light of righteousness, although he shot the leg out from under the defender of virtue." The big head was lowered and weaving a little from left to right. "Then you sent out two more imps and they, too, fell before the Lord's might as aimed in the hands of Powell Beery, and this poor s i n n e r. Once, I wasn't sure, even though I hastened the killer's departure with my carbine. But this time, the truth was out. You hired those killers, Sullivan, and the wrath of the Almighty is piled up against you."

SULLIVAN'S face was greasy with sweat. "You're crazy Morley."

"Sullivan, the village of Deming has given of its sweat to the tune of three-thousand dollars. With that three-thousand dollars, I offer you a choice, better than you offered Powell Beery. Three-thousand dollars for your saloon, which will be turned into Deming's first church, since it's in the center of town and will draw a good crowd at prayer-meetings."

Morley let his voice trail off and licked his lips before he spoke again. "Or...an even chance for life against these guns." Sullivan's face was sagging with disbelief. "Five seconds, Sullivan. Five seconds."

"Morley!" There was something almost pathetic in Sullivan's voice. He spat out the cigar and couldn't say any more. Morley's compelling eyes gave him his answer. The big man mo-

tioned to the bartender without taking his eyes from Sullivan.

"Give him pencil and paper, brother Brown." He nodded to Sullivan. "Write, friend. Write a bill-of-sale for the *Golden Slipper Saloon* and everything in it." Sullivan wrote.

Morley jerked his head toward the bartender again. "Brother Brown, climb up on those shelves of bottled evil and tear down that picture." Brown nervously balanced on the shelves, knocking off bottles whose odors cut sharply into the stale atmosphere, and pulled down the Pink Lady. "Hand it to him, brother Brown."

Sullivan took it meekly enough and clutched it to his gross belly. "Now, Sullivan, march out of here and walk south, in the middle of the road, so that all Deming can see you leaving. And don't look back, Sullivan; don't look back." There was a promise in Morley's words. Sullivan walked, sweat dripping from his face, eyes stricken with shock and awry from it...but he didn't look back.

Deming watched Laertes Sullivan walk out of town, heading over the twin ribbons of the twisting road that led south, out across the majestic sweep of the ageless land, in startled silence. Then Morley's gaunt, stooping frame, leaning on the upright of the *Golden Slipper's* overhang, clutching the bill-of-sale in his mighty talons, made it obvious what had happened.

Sullivan was a tiny, reeling figure, far out under the brilliant sky, stumbling along, clutching the fly-specked grandeur of the Pink Lady, when Powell Beery sat wearily in the tiny parlor of Belinda Thompson's little house and looked into the calm deep eyes of the widow.

"I've had enough, Missus Thompson. More than enough. Anyone can have my badge that wants it."

She nodded in understanding. "You have done more than your share of bringing peace to Deming, Marshal Beery."

"I came to thank you for caring for me that day I got shot in the leg." He could feel the warm blood filling in behind his tanned cheeks and averted his eyes in embarrassment.

Belinda Thompson smiled gently. "You deserve more than that, Powell Beery, from all of us. I was glad to do it."

★

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THE DEADLY SLOWPOKE

Lee Winters Story

by Lon Williams

Why should a man be running around on all fours and growling like a dog? Lee Winters found out when he encountered Dr. Mesmer Ludwig ...

DEPUTY MARSHAL Lee Winters, his thoughts on supper with his beautiful wife Myra, rode into one of those lonely, half-deserted northside streets of ghostly Forlorn Gap. He congratulated himself on having returned without a run-in with death or, of comparable terror, some character out of Myra's books of myths and horrors. But that pleasant state of mind departed suddenly as his big horse Cannon Ball reared, made a half-turn and headed back north.

He gave Winters a hard time for several jumps. Then Winters gave him a hard time by sawing his bit and digging with his spurs. He was under control though skittish, as he reversed direction.

To Lee, a dog's growl was not unusual. It was something else when a man moved about an unfenced yard on hands and feet and growled like a dog That was exactly what he found when he'd got back to where Cannon Ball had made his first turn. They were before a small, unpainted cottage with a porch. A woman in its doorway blocked off part of its lamplight with her slim body

Lee pulled his horse to uneasy anchorage. "Is that you, Liza Wilkerson?"

"Winters! Yes, I'm Liza Wilkerson."

"What's going on here?"

"Oh, Winters, something dreadful has happened to my husband."

"I figured as much," said Winters. He stared down at Wilkerson. "Jim, what's wrong with you?"

"Gr-r-r!" responded Jim. "Bow-wow!"

Winters had a nervous chill. "Say, now, you stop that. Why are you acting like a dog?"

"I am a dog," Jim replied.

"What kind of dog do you figure you are?"

"I'm a great big mastif. Gr-r-r!"

Winters was puzzled, his resources limited. He studied, then said curtly, "Some dogs are smart and some ain't; which kind are you?"

"I'm smart," replied Wilkerson.

Winters scolded angrily, "A smart dog can stand up like a man. Didn't you know that?"

"No," said Jim. He walked round on all fours in a circle, snarling meanwhile

"All right, Liza," said Winters. "Since he's a dog, there's just one thing to do. Get your dog chain and fasten

Winters was wary of strangers.

him to a post. Here, I'll help you."

Winters swung down and ground-hitched his horse.

"Winters, we've got no dog chain," said Liza. "Besides, I don't aim for Jim to sleep outdoors."

Lee disregarded her sudden hostility. "How long's he been like this?"

"If you want to know for other than being curious, I'll tell you. It's since last night. He almost scared me to death when he came home growling, barking and walking around like this."

"Well, I'm not just curious," said Winters. He grabbed Jim and yanked him up. "You're a mighty small dog to be thinking you're a mastif. But big dog or little dog, it's time for all dogs to be in bed. Now get in that house or I'll take you to town and lock you up." He gave Jim a shove, which landed him sprawling inside.

Be-confound if he'd ever heard of such nonsense. "Liza, treat him like a dog, if he insists on being one."

FARTHER along his ride, however, he decided that Jim Wilkerson was not acting nonsense but had gone cuckoo. A thing like that gave him creeps, made him want to pull his head down inside his clothes.

Forlorn Gap's one remaining saloon had its lights going. Its early guests were in fine spirits, except for two or three, who wept over their sorrows.

Doc Bogannon, barkeep and saloon owner, observed his customers nonchalantly. He was big, handsome, with dark hair and fine, impressive features. Privately, he lived contentedly with his half-breed Shoshone wife; publicly, he watched men come and go with detached, tolerant understanding.

Sojourners here were as varied as creation, men who wept, laughed, cursed, or roared in anger. No man, thought Bogie, had enough sympathy in his soul to be sorry for all who had miseries. Nor had Bogie himself enough curiosity to spread over every queer character who came in to drink or otherwise amuse himself. It was enough that he viewed them charitably, without trying to reform them or to separate sheep from goats.

While he meditated, his batwings swung inward and the slim, wiry, weatherbeaten deputy marshal strode in. "Winters!" Bogie exclaimed.

Lee strode forward and planked down a coin. "Wine, Doc."

"Wine it is, Winters." Bogie filled a glass. "You're in town early, Winters. This latest wanted monkey you were after, did you catch him?"

Winters glanced at Bogie's guests and lifted his glass. "Caught him at Pedigo Ranch, Doc. Turned him over to Deputy Tipton of Pangborn Gulch." He drank, backhanded his mustache, gave his head a sidewise nod toward something which had caught his eye. "Who's he, Doc?"

A little man in small round hat and

dark, dirty suit occupied a corner stool at Bogie's bar. Bogie flicked him a careless glance. "In some ways, he's an old friend, Winters. For two months now he's been coming in every evening at exactly eight o'clock. On his first visit, he announced his name and what he wanted. He has not spoken from that time until now."

"Do tell!" exclaimed Winters. "Man of few words, eh?"

Bogie criss-crossed his brow with wrinkles. "Winters, he's truly a man of silence."

"What's his name?"

"Poley B. Delong or, I surmise, Napoleon Bonaparte Delong."

Delong could hardly have avoided overhearing their conversation, yet he gave no sign of having heard at all. His drink was beer; his food, pretzels.

Winters leaned on an elbow. "Doc, did you say you had conversation with him?"

"Incredible as it may seem, Winters, I did."

"What did you talk about?"

"It's a story soon told," said Bogie. "Delong came in and sat where you see him now. He sat there until I was free to ascertain his wants. When I approached and said, 'What will you have, my good friend?' he replied, 'Sir, my name is Poley B. Delong. I shall tell you this once, and I trust it will not be necessary for me to repeat it. Furthermore,' he added, 'I shall be coming in at this same time each evening, and this is what I shall want on each occasion: One mug of beer and two pretzels.' My response was, 'With pleasure, sir.' So began and so ended our first and only conversation."

Winters turned his back and hoisted his elbows. "Reminds me of when I was a yearling calf down in Trinity Valley, Texas. Neighbor of ours named Oslo Carver who lived twenty miles across Trinity Bottoms went out to feed his horse one winter morning. His horse said, 'Howdy, Oslo.' And Os, without thinking, said, 'Howdy, Whizzer.' So far as anybody knowed, Whizzer never said another word as long as he lived."

Bogie wrinkled his forehead soberly. "Winters, it's distressing how people can let you down sometimes, especially when so much is promised and so little given."

"Yeah," drawled Winters, "life in general is pretty much just another horse on Oslo." He put down a second coin. "Doc, if you can do so without stirring up talk, give our friend Delong some wine—with my compliments. Good-night."

WINTERS had been gone but a moment when a picture of cool, exquisite villainy came to life at a nearby table and swung easily forward. He was tall, straight, with thin mustache, scholarly face, black, center-parted hair, black suit, and black stovepipe hat which he held under his left arm. He went round, leaned against Bogie's bar and faced Poley Delong.

"Permit me, sir," he said in soft, musically beguiling tones, "your remarkable poise under difficulty struck me as truly phenomenal."

Delong moved his head an insignificant degree and stared at this smoothly talking stranger. Though he said nothing, his eyes betrayed his question.

"Of course," was his flatterer's answer. "You are interested in my identity. Very well, sir. I am Doctor Mesmer Ludwig, world-famous authority on mental behavior and thought peregrinations. After years of study, I have learned that silence is not man's natural state but is a condition induced by some weird experience. In other words, my friend, you have been victimized by some unscrupulous magician who has placed his dark spell upon you."

Bogannon under pretext of wiping his bar eased closer to hear what was being said. This Ludwig was a rare

one, indeed. A glance told Bogie that his man of silence was being charmed as a bird by a snake.

"You are not truly this mild-mannered mouse which you appear to be," Dr. Ludwig purred on. "You are a strange somnambulist. Without realizing it, you are asleep."

"Sleep," Delong whispered, eyes round and staring.

"Yes, sleep," purred Ludwig. He continued, "Sleep, sleep, gentle, restful sleep."

Delong's eyelids grew weary. "Sleep," he sighed.

"Now," said Ludwig, "you are becoming your true self. You are not a mouse. You are a cat. You are a wildcat. You are a fierce, dangerous wildcat."

Delong bared his teeth and snarled.

"Now you are your true self," said Ludwig. "Yet, because I have removed a curse from you, your behavior henceforth is subject to my will. To prove what I have said, you will get down on your hands and feet and walk round in a circle."

Delong promptly got down and did as ordered.

Several of Bogie's guests left their tables and circled round to watch Delong.

"A right scrawny looking cat," a gold-digger remarked.

"Right high in his hindquarters," said another.

Ludwig threw an appraising glance at his audience, then snapped at Delong, "Growl."

Delong growled.

"Scream."

Delong screamed.

"You are a fierce wildcat," declared Ludwig. "Prove it by tearing these men to shreds."

Delong crouched, growling. Men moved back.

"No, keep him off us," one shouted in mockery.

DELONG charged. Immediately he was caught and tossed about by thick-shouldered gold-diggers and athletic men. Finally, his own clothing torn to shreds, he struck a wall and sat down at its base. He snarled. Otherwise he was subdued.

Ludwig walked over and said firmly, "You will now resume your former place. You will stop growling and be a good kitty."

Delong got up, limped back to his stool and stared submissively at his master.

Ludwig began again in his puring voice, "You are no longer a wildcat; you are your true self again: You are Napoleon Bonaparte Delong."

Delong blinked and looked about as one just awake. He looked at his clothing, groaned in pain from his bumps and bruises. "What happened?"

"Nothing at all," Ludwig advised him gently. "It is merely something you have dreamed. And you are still dreaming. You see, you are asleep. You sleep, sleep, sleep. Now, I shall tell you what you are. You are my pet

sheep. You will go with me wherever I go and obey my every command. Now, down on your hands and feet again and follow me."

Delong obeyed once more.

As they were leaving, Ludwig paused, a door in each hand. "Before we depart, my obedient sheep, you will say goodby by bleating like a nice little lamb."

"Baa!" said Delong.

"Splendid," said Ludwig. "Let us go now."

When they were gone, Bogie's guests stared at one another. Nobody felt like jesting. Bogie himself was sweating. He'd heard of people being mesmerized, had accepted reports as half-truths. And that was what they'd been. Half-truths. Only half had been told.

His reverie was interrupted by an outbreak of calls for whiskey.

"Whiskey!" men shouted.

"Let's have some whiskey."

"Whiskey it is," Bogie responded.

When there was a let-up, he helped himself to wine. He was ashamed of himself, now that he thought seriously of how badly poor Poley Delong had been treated. After all, if a man wanted to keep his mouth shut, that was his own business.

POLEY HIMSELF, being a sheep, had no worries. Two blocks from Bogie's saloon, he and Ludwig were joined by two friends of Ludwig.

"Be a good sheep," said Ludwig. "Stand up like a man. There, that's fine. Now, permit me to introduce my friends, Nelson Ipswitch and Darby Faw. Friends, meet Napoleon Bonaparte Delong."

Ipswitch and Faw grunted surlily.

"What's he got?" asked Ipswitch.

"That," replied Ludwig, "is something Delong will presently tell us. Napoleon, my sheep, where is your gold hidden?"

"Up there," said Poley, pointing northeast.

"Up there are mountains," Ludwig reminded him. "You will state in detail where your gold is."

"Buried," said Poley.

"Then, of course, you will take us to it," said Ludwig. "My friends, horses."

Poley took them on a twenty-minute moonlit ride. His shack was against a cliff where a drip spring had filled his wooden waterbucket nearby. At Ludwig's command, Poley brought out a lighted lantern.

"All right, runt, where's it at?" Ipswitch demanded in a quick, snapping voice.

"Ah, but your procedure is wrong," Ludwig chided. "You forget that our new friend is an obedient sheep. Where is your gold, Sheep?"

Poley pointed to his waterbucket. "Under there."

"Dig it out, Faw," Ludwig commanded.

"Ye-e-e-s, sir," Faw responded with astounding slowness.

He lifted Poley's bucket with equal slowness and moved away its flat under-stone. Under that were other stones, which he likewise removed. Last was a one-gallon stone jar, which was filled with gold coins. This he dragged and lifted out and left at Ludwig's feet.

"Not bad," said Ipswitch. He jerked his head toward Poley. "What do you do with him?"

Ludwig nodded over his left shoulder. "There's a precipice off there. Sheep sometimes fall over precipices." He looked unpityingly at Poley. "Get down on your hands and feet, Sheep."

Poley obeyed.

"Now follow Ipswitch, like a good little lamb."

Poley followed obediently as Ipswitch walked away.

But when Poley saw danger yawning up at him, he drew back.

Ipswitch moved behind him and

gave him a hard shove with his foot. "Over you go, Sheep."

Poley went over and down...

WHEN SUPPER and dishwashing were over, Deputy Marshal Winters and his wife Myra sat in their living room for their usual hour of talk or reading. This time Winters listened to his wife's gossip.

"I think," said Myra, "there's a thief in town."

"Was there ever a town without a thief?" he asked.

"But this is different," Myra insisted. "Sarah and Bart Mellinger have lost all of their savings. They had their gold in a box buried under their hearthstone. Only those two, presumably, knew where it was. Yet this morning Bart looked, intending to add some money, and all of it—yes, all—was gone. And what is most strange, there hasn't been a minute since last they looked but one of them has been at home. Still each professes complete innocence of having taken it."

"Right interesting," said Winters. Privately he was thinking of his own large store of gold whose whereabouts he alone knew. It was treasure in addition to their jointly-owned supply, to which Myra had free access. Considering that he might eventually be outgunned by some wanted monkey, he had his gold hidden where Myra certainly would find it in straightening up his affairs. Yet so long as she didn't know where it was, or even that it existed, no thief could trick or torture her into revealing its whereabouts.

"Is that all you have to say?" Myra inquired.

"I can tell you something more exciting than that," he replied dryly.

"Really? What is it?"

"Jim Wilkerson thinks he's a dog. He goes around on all fours and barks."

"No!"

"Sounds cuckoo, eh?"

"It really does. But maybe there's a reason. Wilkerson's money is also missing."

"Well, be-confound!" Winters exclaimed. He had an alarming suspicion suddenly. "Don't tell me a thief has got our money, too?"

Myra laughed softly. "No, Lee. Of course not. But don't be surprised if it does turn up missing. You see, Fox Geyger's money is gone. So is—"

"Say, now, this looks like a disease that's going round," declared Winters, indignation rising. "Anybody got any idea who's doing all this stealing?"

"Not exactly."

"Not even sort of thereabouts?"

"Well, only as to Herb Hanley. His wife, Bonzy, thinks Herb just gave his away. To complete strangers, too."

"Hmm!" mused Winters. "This ought to be looked into."

BUT A LETTER from Marshal Hugo Landers, received next morning by Winters at Bogie's saloon, sent him on a new manhunt.

That evening Doc Bogannon was serving drinks to a crowded saloon, when his batwings swung in and a handsome, cold-eyed lobo with two guns strode arrogantly in and leaned against Bogie's bar. He eyed Bogie malevolently. "Would you like to pour me a drink, or maybe you'd prefer I help myself?"

Bogie grabbed bottle and glass. "I should regard myself privileged to serve one so distinguished looking."

"You talk my language, I see."

"For which I am most grateful." Bogie filled a glass. "But I must humbly beg your pardon for my not immediately recognizing you."

"Oh, so you don't know me? Now, ain't that a insult for you? Maybe you ain't even heard of Raincrow Martin?"

"Ah," exclaimed Bogie, "I reckon any man who has not heard of Raincrow Martin is, indeed, a rare fish. You do fit his description perfectly, Slender.

Redheaded. Eyes like ice. But handsome."

Raincrow Martin touched his left-hand gun. "I reckon you've heard, also, that I'm right handy with my shootin' irons?"

"Who hasn't?" returned Bogie.

Their conversation was interrupted by appearance of a man in black suit and hightop hat, with a thin, upcurving black mustache.

"Friend Bogannon, be so kind as to introduce me to your friend."

"My apology," responded Bogie, glad to be interrupted. "Mr. Martin, my good friend Dr. Mesmer Ludwig. Dr. Ludwig, my most recent and respected acquaintance, none other than Raincrow Martin himself."

"Delighted," said Ludwig.

"Yeah?" sneered Martin. "And just what kind of doctor are you?"

Ludwig bowed slightly, but kept fixed gaze upon Martin. "If I may speak somewhat boastfully, I am a world-famous doctor of human minds."

"You don't say!" sneered Martin. "And what do you think you can do for a feller's mind?"

"Without your cooperation, I can of course do nothing," replied Ludwig. "With your cooperation, I can do much. As your intelligence increases, so does my power to be of assistance. Of course, in your case, there is no need of a doctor's helpful ministrations, for I can see that you are one of remarkably keen intellect."

Guests began to gather round.

A gold-digger said gruffly, "Ludwig, I bet you can't put no spell on him."

"What do you mean, spell?" demanded Martin.

"I mean put you under a spell—make you think you're a wolf or wildcat or grizzly."

Martin stared round at curious, expectant faces. "I hope you don't think I'd be fool enough to let him do that to me?"

Ludwig smiled. "Of course not. You would not submit to any such abasement. Moreover, my interest in your case would be improving your most noteworthy qualities. You are fast with your guns, but I could make you faster. You are quick of thought, but I could make you quicker."

"Well," said Martin, "if you can do all that, maybe I *would* let you."

Four men at a poker table were too interested in their game to gather round Ludwig's group. One of them called irritably, "You there! Whiskey!"

"On it's way," answered Bogie.

He left reluctantly. As reluctantly he responded to other calls. A half-stewed ape wanted to weep and relate his troubles. Another wanted an excuse to start destruction. Bogie lost time in quieting both of them.

WHEN HE got back to where he could see Ludwig and Raincrow Martin, Raincrow had that queer sleepy look which characterized a man going under a spell.

Ludwig was saying, "In your present state you are subject to my will, not your own. You sleep, yet you do not sleep. You sleep, and you will not wake until I command you. Now something strange is happening. You are slowing down. You are slow, slow, slow. Now you have completely stopped. You cannot move your hands. You cannot draw your guns. Your hands are in my power. You cannot move them. Why don't you try to move your hands? Ah, you do try. You do, but you cannot."

Bogie stared, amazed. Martin was trying, yet he could not move his hands. "Wonder of wonders," Bogie murmured.

Spectators stared, dumbfounded.

"But you can move your hands now," said Ludwig. "You can move them, though not fast. You can move them slowly, very slowly. See, it is as I told you. You can draw your guns,

but so slowly, so slowly. You will never be fast again until I give my word. You are now subject to my will. You will obey me. You cannot move fast. You will move slowly, talk slowly, and if you are minded to use your guns you will draw them slowly. Slowly."

Suddenly Bogie's batwings swung inward again. A man of tall, athletic proportions strode hurriedly in. He pushed through until he faced Martin.

"Raincrow!" he shouted.

Martin stared at him. His lips moved in a snarl. "Ipswitch! Dirty, doublecrossin' Ipswitch. So we've met again." His voice was filled with hate, yet his words were frighteningly slow. "All right, Nelse, you know what this means."

Men backed hurriedly, expecting gunplay.

Ipswitch also drew back. "No!" he shouted. "Don't draw, Raincrow."

Raincrow was coming up with both guns, coming with distressful slowness.

Ipswitch continued to back. But when Raincrow's guns were out of their holsters and slowly lifting, Ipswitch with speed almost quicker than sight snapped up his gun and fired.

Bogannon blinked his eyes. There'd been other killings in his saloon. He'd taken them as they came, events as inevitable as these gold-rush towns themselves. But this one left him peculiarly cold.

LONG AFTER an undertaker had come and gone with Raincrow's body, Bogie sweated and racked his brain. To him as to the other spectators, it had appeared superficially as a killing in self-defense. In reality it had certainly been murder. Who was this Ipswitch? How had he happened to appear at a moment so favorable to himself?

In time, however, Bogie shrugged it off as something beyond his jurisdiction. He was only a man who sold whiskey to wayfarers, strangers who demanded it as one of life's necessities. They came, they went, they were forgotten.

Likewise this sinister mesmerizer had come and would go. He was friendly, polite, outwardly kind. But Bogie perceived in him more than an evil eye. Toward Mesmer Ludwig, death pointed, as a finger.

Three evenings later Ludwig was in Bogie's saloon indulging in small risks at poker, when Bogie's batwings swung in.

"Winters!" exclaimed Bogie. "Come in, Winters."

Winters advanced and paid his tribute. "Wine, Doc."

"Wine it is, Winters," Bogie responded. In a low voice he added as he poured, "Am I glad to see you!"

"How come, Doc?"

Bogie slowly mopped his bar. "Winters, something has gone wrong in this town. People are afraid, yet they don't know what it is they're afraid of. Savings of hard-working miners have disappeared mysteriously."

"Hmm!" mused Winters. "Any people disappeared?"

"Not that I know of."

Winters glanced about. He was about to ask for Doc's little man of silence, when his attention was distracted by movement.

A man in black suit, with thin upcurving mustache and hightop hat rose and came toward him, his face alive with smiling friendliness. "Bogannon," he said pleasantly, "may I claim your courtesy?" He nodded toward Winters.

"Indeed, my apology," Bogie replied. "Winters, my new and distinguished friend, Dr. Mesmer Ludwig. Ludwig, my old and trusted friend, Deputy Marshal Lee Winters."

Winters did not offer to shake hands. What he saw in Ludwig's eyes warned him that he might later have to shoot their owner. Moreover, experience had long ago taught him to be wary of Bogannon's new friends.

He said, "Howdy."

Ludwig nodded, but now Winters perceived that his smile was cold and eerie.

"Indeed, a pleasure, Officer Winters."

Guests gathered round. A gold-digger said, "Ludwig, I bet you can't put no spell on Winters."

Winters felt his scalp tingle. "Spell?"

"No, no," Ludwig said softly. "I'm no good at that."

"No?" said bystanders. "That's not accordin' to what we've been seeing hereabouts."

Winters stared in awe at Ludwig. "You mean you can mesmerize people?"

"Winters," Bogie said in sharp warning, "he certainly can."

"I don't believe it," said Winters.

"If you don't, then of course I can't," said Ludwig, lifting an elbow to Bogie's bar and leaning closer to Winters. "I admit that I have had passing amusement for all of us by exercise of what these good men choose to call a spell."

Winters backhanded his mustache. "That's as interesting as a raccoon with his fist in a bottle. How do you do it, Ludwig?"

"It's fairly simple," replied Ludwig, beginning to concentrate coldly. "It requires your cooperation, of course. But you only have to listen to what I say, to believe what I tell you, and to offer no resistance to my commands."

"Huh!" scoffed Winters. "Want to try it on me?"

"Only in fun, Winters," responded Ludwig.

"Winters!" Bogannon intervened sharply. "I have word for you, Winters. I must see you privately."

Winters was staring at Ludwig. "I'm your man, Lud."

LUDWIG drew inches closer and vanquished frivolity. "Winters, a great manipulator of human thought named Count Mesmer, for who, my parents flatteringly named me, had one simple formula, concealed though it was beneath useless gestures and distension of eyes and nostrils. Success depends upon you, Winters, rather than upon me. You merely relax—relax—relax. There. You realize that we are all your friends, that no harm will come to you. I note that you are relaxing surprisingly well, and that is good. With relaxation comes sleep. You close your eyes. You tell yourself that you are asleep. Of course your nerves respond to your thought. You relax your body, your eyes. Slowly, slowly, you sink into sleep."

Obediently Winters had closed his eyes. He heard Bogannon speak insistently into his ear, "Winters, I must see you. Winters!" He ignored Bogie, but listened closely to Ludwig.

"Now, Winters," Ludwig was saying, "you will open your eyes. You have passed from your former superficial self into your real self. You are now Lee Winters. But in relaxation your will has given up its control over you. My will has taken its place. To prove it, I tell you now that your right hand has become paralyzed. You cannot move it. Though you try with all your might, you cannot move your right hand. Would you like to try it, Winters?"

Spectators crowded close and stared at Winters.

"He's done it," several exclaimed. "Ludwig has put a spell on him."

"Now," said Ludwig, "your paralysis is gone. You can move your hand, though only at a snail's pace. Try it, Winters. Slowly. Slowly. Your hand can no longer move fast. There, did I not tell you? You can draw your gun, Winters, but your draw is greatly slowed."

Spectators gasped in amazement. Winters drew his sixgun, but it took several seconds for him to lift it.

"Winters!" Bogie called insistently. "Don't trust him, Winters."

Winters stared at Ludwig, dog-like expectancy in his countenance.

"Well," Ludwig sighed, "I must be leaving. Good-night, G e n t l e m e n." When almost out, he turned. "Perhaps you would like to come along, Winters. I'm going your way and shall be glad to see you safely home."

Slowly Winters followed Ludwig.

Bogannon called, "Winters, don't do it." He stared round. "You men stop him."

"Aw, let him go," a drummer suggested carelessly. "Ludwig won't hurt him."

Bogie was diverted by numerous demands for whiskey. Yet he worried. His fears were worsened by recollection of his little man of silence, one Poley B. Delong. Poley had gone out with Ludwig. Come to think of it, he hadn't seen Poley again.

Outside, Winters dragged himself onto his horse and followed Ludwig, who had mounted his own animal and was riding off. Cannon Ball, spurred lightly, promptly overtook Ludwig's horse.

"You understand, of course," said Ludwig, "that you must do what I tell you to do?"

"I understand," replied Winters.

They turned into a deserted part of town and stopped before an old shack where a lamp burned.

"Dismount, Winters."

Slowly Winters eased himself down.

TWO STRANGERS came out. Bright moonlight revealed one as of excellent proportions, alert, suspicious. "Who comes now?" this one asked coldly.

"Ipswitch," said Ludwig, "this is Deputy Marshal Lee Winters, reputedly of considerable means. Winters, my servant Nelson Ipswitch. You will bow to him as your superior in handling guns."

Winters nodded with marked slowness. "My superior," he drawled.

"And this," said Ludwig, "is my other servant, Darby Faw. He, like yourself, moves very slowly. You see how it is, Winters. Both of my servants are subject to my will. One I have made extremely fast; one, extremely slow."

"Slow, like me," said Winters.

"Exactly," said Ludwig. "Now, Winters, we shall waste no more time. I have a mission for you."

"Mission?"

"Yes. You will go to your home, collect all of your money and bring it here to me."

Winters said draggily, "Bring you all my money?"

"Exactly. You are under my power, Winters. You will do as I say. Get on your horse and ride. You will return here in exactly twenty minutes. You are in my power, Winters. Do as I have told you."

"But I couldn't do that," Winters protested, his words pouring like cold molasses. "I couldn't give you my money."

"You would disobey your master?"

"Ye-e-e-s," said Winters.

"That is too bad," said Ludwig. "For your disobedience, we shall have to kill you. Ipswitch, get ready."

Ipswitch stepped briskly in front of Winters. "I always give my adversary five seconds before I draw. Go ahead, Winters."

"No," Winters objected, "I—don't -want no—gunfight. I—couldn't "

"You have no choice, Winters," Ludwig told him crisply. "Ipswitch has his orders. He never disobeys"

"Go for your gun, Winters," snarled Ipswitch.

Winters sleeved his forehead. "You've—got too much—"

"I'm counting five on you, Winters. One!"

Winters lowered his hand, gripped his gun.

"Two!" snapped Ipswitch. "Three! Four!"

He waited, but Winters didn't wait. Slowness suddenly ceased. In one swift motion his gun came up, his left hand palmed its hammer. Ipswitch staggered back, fell, kicked twice, and was dead. Winters whirled as Ludwig's gun came from an under-arm holster. Ludwig fired, but it was downward into his own flesh. Lee's third bullet knocked Darby Faw into a squatting heap with a gun smoking in his dead hand.

BEFORE DOC BOGANNON had recovered from worries for Winters, his batwings swung in.

"Winters! Come in, Winters."

Winters strode to a table with a heavy canvas bag. "There's their loot, Doc. I reckon your fellow-citizens as it belongs to can come and get it."

Soon he was surrounded by curious guests.

Bogie was among them. "Winters, you had me scared; I thought Ludwig had put a spell on you."

"That's what Ludwig thought, too," responded Winters. "But while he told me I was slow, I was telling myself I was fast. You heard him say he had to have cooperation in order to mesmerize a man. Well, I didn't cooperate."

A "New Look" on the Old West

Your enthusiastic support of our magazine **FAMOUS WESTERN** has encouraged us to heed the many readers who have written in, urging us to go to the more convenient pocket-size format.

The new October issue features a book-length novel, based upon a famous character of the Old West. Don't miss "THE OATH OF BILL BONNEY by H C. Early. Plus a special article upon another colorful figure of the past— "A HOLLIDAY IN TOMBSTONE' by Wayne Jordan. These, and other stories, are in

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CLEM GILMORE'S WAR

by Glen Monroe

The Seventh Cavalry had its hands full during the great Messiah craze, but Clem Gilmore had a private war on a war with a man who may have been an officer, but was no gentleman!

"SAY, YOU rookies don't know nothin' about real hosses!" snorted the old campaigner, coming into the conversation suddenly. "If this here old Seventh Cavalry ain't had the smartest hossflesh in the Dakotas durin' the old days, I'll lose my ante. Hosses! Why, what about Old Baldy? And what about Commanche, Cap'n Keogh's mount, that was put on a pension by the War Department as the on'y survivor of the Custer Massacree back in the Sioux seventies. A lot different from the nags they issue to yuh nowadays."

The speaker raised himself in his bunk, and vehemently spattered the barrack's stove with a spray of tobacco juice, while the men of Troop C were hushed with attention. The old trooper's reservoir of talk, made brimming by long silence, was beginning one of its periodic overflows.

"But there was another hoss belongin' to this here troop that was smarter'n any of 'em, and we got him durin' the Messiah craze and Sioux uprisin' in 1890, long before yore time in the outfit. We'd been follerin' a Injun trail for weeks and lived on nothin' but prairie dog and cactus salad, till one mornin' some of the boys up and pulled out for game country and meat. When we filled up good on buffalo hump and venison, we got back to camp with the redskin smell fresh out of our noses on'y to be ordered to hit the trail again, for the Sioux was on the prod.

"The mount I'm referrin' to was rid by Clem Gilmore, who used to be bugler in Troop C Clem riz from the ranks to cap'n, married a colonel's daughter, but he was killed in the Philippines in '98. We used to be bunkies, him and me. One of the squarest and nerviest lads that ever straddled a gov'ment mount.

"And do yuh know he onct deserted on account of his hoss—and a man. The hoss was a soldier. But the man was a peak nosed runt of a second

Louey named Lester Keiser—all varnish and strut. The boys hated him like pizened dirt, and he got back at 'em every chance. Them was the wild and woolly days, I tell yuh! The saddler in the case was one of the finest pieces of hossflesh that ever carried the U. S. brand. Keiser wanted him, but Gilmore got him. Then there was hell all around—'specially for Clem.

"We got the hoss in a queer way. We was chasin' old Strike-the-Kettle, one of Sittin' Bull's leaders, along the Upper Grand River. Gilmore and Keiser, and our troop, and a couple of others was ahead of the main command, keepin' a eye on the Injun rear. Right in the middle of a runnin' fight every danged redman suddenly disappeared; then, it was look out for ambush. Our men was scattered, and the colonel sent Clem to a high ridge, a little ways ahead, to sound recall.

"Clem was a reckless sort o' kid in them days. He had a habit of gettin' there when he was sent, and Colonel Furey—Old Leather Breeches the boys called him, for he was an old hand at the game, and an Injun fighter to his fingertips who swore in six languages—took a shine to Clem, and always wanted him around.

"Well, Gilmore was up there on the ridge tootin' away about twice as far ahead as he ought to have been, as usual, when away down in the brush below he hears a crashin' and thrashin' about as if a unruly cayuse was kickin' up the bushes. So he pulls his Colt and sends some slugs into the thicket just for luck. Well, sir! It was fairly alive with red savages. They thought we saw 'em, and they scattered like a bunch of scared rabbits. There was Clem, six-shooter in one hand and bugle in the other, tootin' and tootin' away, when all of a sudden a beautiful big black hoss, with a painted brave on his back, broke from covert and headed straight for Clem. Our line was formin' a quarter of a mile back, when Old Leather Breeches got sight of the flyin' Injuns, and then he give us the charge, and away we went after 'em.

"We could see the big black tearin' along toward Gilmore. The Injun on his back was a tall buck, wearin' a white ghost-shirt, with a war-bonnet of eagle feathers streamin' out behind, and he was layin' back on the reins, tryin' to stop. But on that brute's back he was helpless as a papoose in a rawhide cage. And the runnin' of that animal was a sight to behold! It fairly made us yell. He was rangy and powerful built, and had the action of a thoroughbred. He was goin' like the wind, his head pushed far out, and him gatherin' and stretchin' as easy and graceful as a antelope.

"When he got in sight of our blue line he whinnered to us. That showed the wind he had. We was a-whoopin' it up to reach the reds before they got to cover, and the big black with his Sioux rider was headin' straight toward us. He dashed by Gilmore, and Clem took right after him.

"THEY HAD to cross a brushy hollow to reach us, and there the Injun tried to dismount, but the hoss was goin' too awful fast. Then he raised his gun and put the muzzle agin the critter's ear—but just at that minute Gilmore pinned him in the back. He yelled fierce and went over the black's head, while the hoss kept acomin'. We opened ranks and let him through, with Gilmore at his heels.

"The bugler never was proud of that shot in the back, but we all declared that in our opinion any skunk who'd maim such a hoss just to escape capture deserved killin' with a pitchfork—shootin' was too good for him.

"After the line passed, the black wheeled and trotted up to Clem, whinnerin' and laughin' as only a happy hoss can. Clem was wanted at the front, and he had no time to waste. So he tucked his hank'chief under the saddle-bow and turned the animal

loose. He spotted the big U. S. brand on the shoulder, too, the way they used to burn 'em, so he knowed it must 'a been a captured army hoss. When he'd heard the bugle so close he just grabbed the bit in his teeth and bolted. There was no danger of his runnin' away, so Gilmore left him and skipped to his post. Well, sir, that hoss made straight for the blue line, jammed into place, and through the whole fracas kept the formation like a veteran. When we halted he walked around among the boys, makin' friends with all of us, and chawin' manes with our saddlers.

"The main part of the command caught up with us pretty soon, but Clem had to stay with the colonel till we went into camp. The first thing he did was to go rustlin' about for that beauty of a hoss. He found that black at the officers' fire, with Keiser aholdin' on the bridle and the whole officers' mess standin' in admiration.

" 'I've come after my hoss, sir,' says Gilmore, salutin' Keiser.

" 'Yours!' barks Keiser, high and mighty.

" 'Yes, sir, I got him first,' says Clem. 'Here's my hank'chief I put under the saddle. See, it has my name and number,' he explains, pullin' out the hank'chief.

" 'What's that got to do with it?" snaps the shave-tail, squarin' himself like he was Napoleon.

" 'I captured the hoss, lieutenant, and I think I ought to have him,' says the bugler.

" 'You're lyin' to a officer, do you know that?' growls Keiser. 'The hoss was runnin' loose when I got him. Go back to yore quarters. I'll report yuh for impertinence!"

"Now, half the men had turned in their saddles and saw Gilmore ketch the black. Maybe Keiser didn't see it, but the hank'chief was there, and if he hadn't been a selfish little whelp he'd 'a found out how it got under the saddle. Clem had to come away without the mount, but he didn't give up. Not by a damn sight! Next mornin' early he went to the colonel's headquarters He said he wanted the big black more'n anything in the world or he'd 'a backed away from Old Leather Breeches after he saw him. The old boy was fierce-lookin', anyhow, but when Clem went in he was writin' and wearin' glasses, which always made him look ten times tougher. To make matters worse, he'd just got orders from General Miles he didn't like, and, altogether, he was purple in the face. Gilmore said he looked as savage as a grizzly with a trap on each foot. But it was face the old boy or lose the hoss, so Clem laid on the sob stuff thicker'n fat on gov'ment bacon. He says, meek-like.

" 'Colonel Furey, I captured a hoss yesterday, and Lieutenant Keiser took him away from me.'

"The old man didn't like Keiser. He thought he had a yeller streak, and treated him accordin' and if you'd knowed Old Leather Breeches that would mean a lot to yuh. But he liked the bugler in his gruff way. He give him a good word, the day before, too, for uncoverin' the Sioux ambush.

" 'What, that black yuh chased into the lines yesterday?' roars the old man.

" 'Yes, sir,' says Gilmore, 'and I need him bad—mine's on three laigs every mornin'."

"Then the colonel cussed till the tent shook. 'Go take yore hoss and keep him!' he bellers. 'Orderly, tell Lieutenant Keiser to report here at onct!'

"WHAT Lester Keiser got from Old Leather Breeches that mornin' we never knowed, but for a week after the young cub was act'ally meek So Gilmore brought the big black around to his hitchin' post and turned his old saddler over to the quartermaster.

"Blackie, Clem named his new hoss

on account of his jet-black color. The Injuns had ganted him up purty bad, and his mouth was cut and tore from the Mex spade bit they'd used on him. But Clem patched him up, and fed him, and slicked him till he looked like a sultan's favorite. In a week or two Blackie was the pride of the Seventh. I'd give a month's pay right now to shake hands with the soldier that had trained him. He knowed every call before the bugle finished it, and never made a mistake. At monkey drills and trick ridin' he was a wonder, and Clem was just onery enough to keep him company in anything he'd do. It was the show of the post to see them two get out of an evenin' and go through their capers. Even the colonel used to come out and watch and grin. If ever a man loved a hoss Clem Gilmore loved Blackie, and the old hoss made good every time.

"But Keiser, the dirty dog, was bent on gettin' that animal by hook or by crook. His hungerin' eyes was follerin' him continually. Often on parade I've seen him turn in his saddle to watch Blackie cuttin' square corners and wheelin' and startin' as proud as a drum major. It did Clem's kid heart good, too, to show the mount off when Keiser was around. About the stables Keiser was forever pettin' the critter and fussin' over him. The on'y good thing I could say of the upstart was that he knowed and respected genuine hossflesh. Devilish treatment, though, Clem got from Keiser after the mornin' in the colonel's tent. Keiser had laid a deep scheme to get Blackie, and he played it cruel hard. Gilmore's term run out that winter, and the lieutenant knowed it. He calc'lated that Clem would up and quit the service if it was made good and hot for him durin' the last few months Blackie was gov'ment property, and if Clem left the outfit Keiser could grab him. But the trumpeter called his bluff.

"Gilmore's life was worse than slavery the rest of the summer. He was on fatigue and night duty every time Keiser could put him there, and the dirtiest and most dangerous work the lieutenant could find or invent was sent his way. One day that winter while we was haulin' a Gatlin' and a Hotchkiss gun and some freight, a six-mule team broke through the ice on Beaver Creek. As luck would have it, Clem was drivin', and Keiser was in charge. The little blaggard pulled out his revolver and made Clem get down into the slush, waist-deep, to block up the wheels. As a result pneumonie set in and nearly killed the lad.

"Out of the hospital several months after, came Gilmore, lookin' like a mortal wreck. It was the very day his term expired, and the pore devil said he guessed he'd quit the army and go home for a rest. But that afternoon he put his arms around my neck, for he was weak and wobbly, and we walked over to the stables to see Blackie. Well, sir, the old hoss knowed Clem's shadder the moment we entered the door. He whinnered and pawed in his stall, and when Clem went in beside him he snuffed all over him and rubbed his nose agin him as if it was just too good to be true that Clem had come back. And Gilmore he just broke down, too.

"When we left the stables, Clem started off without any help from me. 'Yer gettin' better purty fast, ain't yuh?' I says to him.

" 'I'm all better,' he answers, with snap. 'I'm not goin' back to the barracks just yet,' he blurted out, as he headed a different way.

" 'Where yuh goin'?' I asks.

" 'I'm goin over to the sarjant's and sign up for another hitch.'

And he did just that.

"Gilmore soon built up and got strong again, in spite of the infernal abuse Keiser heaped on him. The lieutenant was surprised and disappointed when Clem reenlisted, and started to get even. But the trumpeter seemed to keep his spirits up as long as he had Blackie to pet and

talk to. The old feller seemed to know Clem was havin' a tough time of it, too, for every mornin' he'd whinner a welcome, and tuck his muzzle under Clem's arm in the gentlest way, as if tellin' him to 'buck up' and 'never mind.' Things looked purty black for Gilmore, though, when Colonel Furey was called to Washington for a palaver. The colonel was a terror to Keiser and made him careful. But now Clem was really in a bad way. A few days after the old man had left, Clem went to Blackie's stall and found it empty. Keiser had taken him. Clem vowed to me then and there that he'd desert and take his hoss along.

"THE CHANCE Clem was waitin' for soon came. It was in the middle of a week-long snowstorm, and the stable sarjant got dead drunk. We put him to bed, and Clem volunteered to take his place. Instead, he got into some civies he had ready, strapped a blanket on Blackie and struck out into the blindin' snow. I didn't sleep much that night for thinkin' of Clem out in the blizzard. But I knowed he had a hoss under him with bottom that never was reached, and that would stick to him to the last ditch.

"There was heap big excitement when Gilmore and the hoss was missed the next mornin', and a mounted squad started out after 'em. But, hell! there wasn't a nag in the command that could keep Blackie in sight, let alone ketch him after eight hours' start. Gilmore was caught, though. The telegraph did it within a week. He was brought back, court-martialed, and got twelve months at hard labor, forfeited a year's pay, and, worst of all, lost Blackie for good.

"A year in the guardhouse ain't apt to make a man sweet-tempered or ready to forget a wrong. Clem came out busted from a first-class musician to a buck private, sick and discouraged. But he had one burnin' purpose in mind. I knowed, though he never talked of it, and that was to get square with Keiser. The lousy coyote knowed Clem had it in for him, and he took special care never to be caught alone. Gilmore wasn't a revengeful feller by nature, but he was a kid then, half-crazed by abuse and the loss of his pet. He could 'a killed Keiser easy enough, but that wouldn't 'a satisfied Clem in the state of mind he was in. He wanted to fight him, and fight him to death. So things went on for a month or so, each watchin' the other like a couple of tigers, till one bloody day God A'mighty stepped between 'em.

"A buck private about to force a duel on a officer is no light matter, and it was the luckiest thing that ever happened to Gilmore when Troop C was sent out that spring to round up Big Foot's band that had fled into the Badlands where they was ghost-dancin', drinkin', and raisin' hell generally. Keiser was first lieutenant then, and Cap'n Forsythe bein' sick, Keiser was in command. There was a lot of guessin' among the boys as to how he'd behave in leadin' a fight. The majority 'lowed Keiser was yeller all the way through—and the majority was right.

"Well, we struck the Sioux trail and soon raised a covey of a hundred of 'em. They headed up a narrow gulch, and Keiser sent us right after 'em. We knowed that there was five hundred of the hostiles in the neighborhood, and while it was all right to pitch into the small bunch, it was a schoolboy trick to follow 'em up too close when they got into the gulch. When the covey run away, though, Keiser thought he was whippin' 'em good, and as we reached the gorge he ordered us to break formation and dash through after 'em. It was the beginnin' of his idiotic performances that day, which cost us nearly half the troop.

"We crowded about halfway through the rocky pass, and there was no

shootin' except from a scatterin' line on the rimrock, a quarter of a mile ahead. That silence meant a lot of the men who'd fought Injuns before Keiser had quit his nursing bottle. All at once there broke out from every side the wildest din of yellin' and screechin' that ever tortured mortal ears. Gunfire came rattlin' down, and a smoke cloud hid everything a minute after, except the points of flame that shot from behind the rocks and trees in a complete circle around us. Five hundred Sioux rifles was bangin' away and not one visible feathered head for us to aim at.

"Soldiers was droppin' here and there, and more was hunched over their saddles, holdin' to the hoss's mane with both hands. Shot mounts began chargin' up and down, screamin' with fear and pain, while others went wild and started to mill. Round and round they went, buttin' and jammin', some fairly climbin' the others' backs. The men was waitin' for orders that didn't come. They tried to hold their animals, but it was no use. Inside of three minutes the whole command was a crazy, yellin', swearin' mob. We could 'a' cut our way out if we'd got the proper orders, but Keiser, the rankin' officer, was gawkin' around like a scared halfwit. All the time men was goin' down like sheep in a hailstorm, without a chance to shoot back.

"Gilmore and me was caught in the mix together, and nearby was Second Louey Faversham, callin' the steadiest men by name, and beggin' 'em to straighten out. Then he yelled to Keiser to sound the charge for God's sake. But Keiser was speechless. His bugler had been shot off his hoss and was close to us, a-hangin' to another feller's stirrup. Clem grabbed the trumpet, and Faversham saw him.

" 'Quick, Gilmore, the charge!' he orders, and the call Clem blew was the sweetest sound I ever heard.

"AT THE first note the mounts began to scramble into line; in thirty seconds we made a front and was movin' forward toward open ground, drivin the reds before us.

"On a ridge ahead was a line of heavy firin'. We set out to reach it double quick. Clem and me was amongst the leaders, him still buglin' away. In the middle of the excitement and danger Clem was thinkin' on'y of Blackie. He looked around for him, and there he was in the rear with Keiser, the yellow-belly, holdin' him in. The old black was rearin' and plungin' agin the bit, for he knowed his place was up in front. Gilmore aimed the horn backward and blew. Well, Blackie fairly jumped off the ground. A dozen men couldn't 'a' held him then. He bolted through the crowd and raced up among the very foremost of the skirmishers.

"Lieutenant Keiser sawed on the reins, but it was no use, Blackie didn't even feel it. Gilmore could 'a' riddled the wiser, for Injun lead was flyin' in every direction. But he didn't. He told me afterward that the temptation come to him, but a second after, he experienced one of them moral victories the chaplain tells about. Keiser was yeller as Sioux ochre. Gilmore knowed and despised him; the whole outfit knowed and despised him.

"The Sioux braves kept runnin' back, shootin' quick and straight. Blackie had carried Keiser to the very front, and there the Injuns singled out his officer's uniform for a target. Suddenly the lieutenant wilted and slid off the saddle. That instant Clem dashed for the big black hoss. If Keiser was dead, Blackie would be his again. But before Gilmore reached him the beautiful creature was cut down, too.

"When we got to open ground and turned to face the redskins comin' up from the rear, there was honest-to-God tears pourin' down Clem's powder-smeared cheeks. The kid was heartbroken, for Blackie was dead. Then

the Sioux swept down and we had to shoot our hosses and lay behind 'em thirty hours, till help come....

"That was the Battle of Wounded Knee.

"Two days later when the hostiles was drove off we went back over the fight ground. Keiser's body had been riddled with a dozen bullets. The Injuns had been at him and gave him the dose a killed officer usually gets. He was stripped and scalped, a green-feathered arrow stuck out of both eye-sockets, and his heart hung on a sharpened limb of a nearby bush. Blackie was stretched out too, not far away. Clem and me was standin' beside the body while they counted the slugs in Keiser.

" 'Old pal,' says Clem, 'I knowed he'd get his medicine some time and get it good, but I'm glad they've found one bullet less in his carcass than there might 'a been!' "

The First Train Robbery

by J. J. Mathews

THE COMING of the railroad dealt a severe blow to organized stage banditry of the early-day West. But in Nevada there remained at least one bandit leader, ostensibly a prosperous mill owner, who was unperturbed by the change. He perpetrated the first train robbery in history on the morning of November 1, 1870.

Jack Davis, generally credited with being the leader of the boldest gang of stage bandits in Nevada, and his associates, masked and heavily armed, terrorized the train crew with their guns. The news of the holdup stirred universal interest.

Davis' operations as a stage robber had been hard to prove. Similarly, other bandits continued their unlawful activities unmolested. It was not until 1865 that the first notable arraignment of Nevada's knights of the road took place, but this proved disappointing to the exponents of law and order for the leader of the gang, Jack Harris, was acquitted.

From that date on the stage robberies appeared to be under more skillful leadership; and Jack Davis was the "brains" of the operators.

The genius of Davis turned to the first train robbery but it ended there, for a week later he and his gang had been apprehended. Davis turned over his share of the $40,000 train loot, pleaded guilty and was sentenced to ten years in the penitentiary. With his sentencing, it was disclosed that the mill he operated had been hired only to facilitate the remelting and marketing of the bullion obtained by systematic stage robbery.

The colorful career of the man who executed the original train robbery came to an inglorious end behind Nevada's prison bars in 1872. He died without his boots on.

In the "Big Break" from the Nevada penitentiary September 17, 1871, twenty-nine prisoners escaped. Among them were members of the Davis gang —Chapman, Parsons, Squires and Cockerill. They were all recaptured within a month, however. Parsons, confined to the Ormsby county jail, soon escaped, though, and remained at liberty for several years.

An interesting chapter in the story of western stage robberies was written in 1866 when two stages, both crowded with passengers, were stopped together by seven highwaymen, believed to be Davis' gang. The robbers extemporized a gala party for the despoiled, generously regaling them with delicacies and champagne discovered in one of the coaches. Rugs were spread for the ladies and the affair was conducted throughout in the courteous style of the old time highwaymen.

THE RED MAN'S STORY

A Series of True Fact Articles

by White Eagle

21. When Spirits Speak

THE TRIP back to Dakota territory, turned out to be rough trailing, what with snow, sleet and rain. We had expected some bad weather, but nothing like what we ran into. I took it as a matter of fact; so did How and Red Hawk; even the Kid took it in his stride. But not so the Red One, he kept cussing the weather, and the world in general until I, tiring of his bellyaching, spoke angrily. "My brother will keep his peace; we others, who speak no words—we, too are cold. But we keep our peace, and say nothing."

"Sure, but ain't we soaked to our hides? Sure would be somethin' if'n what's left of old man winter would give us a good freeze. Then sure 'nough, we would be froze hard as a ice-cickle, ready to hang on a Crixmas-tree, like the one yore woman and Emma put up fer us back yernder. Anyway, what fer did we come to this dawg-gone country? Well, reckon it ain't no matter. Sure is a good thing we didn't bring old snowball, and the women, anyway. I been wonderin' how that half-breed kid of mine is doin' back in the village. Hope he ain't froze like me."

"The Red One, need not fear for his son, he is well cared for."

On May the fifth 1887, we again rode into Fort Thompson, and were welcomed by both the Colonel and his wife. Inquiring about Anette and her party, I was told that no boat would arrive at Fort Thompson until about

White Eagle, as some of our regular readers know, is Mr. Pete Carter of Miles City, Montana. One of the few remaining old-timers, who lived through the period of the real Old West, Mr. Carter has drawn upon the memories of his father for this series of stories. His father was adopted, as a boy, by the Sioux (as related in the first story of this series), and won the name "White Eagle".

While we have made a few minor alterations in these stories, for the sake of clarity, we hope we have not lost the true feeling of the Indian which informs their style.

June. I, of course, had not expected this to be so; but there wasn't a thing we could do about it."

Entering the Colonel's residence again on May the sixth, I spoke seriously to both of them. "Anette, my wife, is not well. She is to have a baby; it's not good for her to worry, and wait away from the Eagle."

Smiling up at me, the Colonel's wife took my hand, and led me to the couch, asking that I sit by her side, saying she wanted to talk to me about Anette. When we were seated, she spoke words of wisdom, something of which I knew nothing.

"My son, if your wife is to bear a child, she should not travel. And when she comes here, you must not take her overland to the ones you call your people. It would kill the child; and perhaps your lovely wife. No, my son, you must leave her here with us, until the baby has arrived. Here she will have medical care; we do have a military hospital here at the Post and very good doctors, too. What does my son say? Will you let me care for your wife until the baby arrives?"

"The old one, who is now with Anette and Emma, spoke as you my mother. You have both spoken wisely of something which I know nothing. I am but a man, not yet wise to the sufferings of women during childbirth. I wish to do as my mother says; you will care for Anette and Emma when they arrive on the water. You'll also tell the old one (Crawford) to wait here till I return for my wife and son."

Smiling up at me with motherly love

in her eyes, she said, "But, my dear, it might well be a girl, a daughter, that you'll get."

Jumping to my feet I spoke angrily. "No—girls can come later; it's a boy I wish. I go now to my people, who wait for my return."

The Colonel, who had risen from his seat spoke up. "Tell me, young man, should it turn out to be a girl, what would you do?"

For a moment, I stood looking into his pale gray eyes, then I spoke. "Should the Spirits fail to grant the Eagle the boy I want, then I shall always love the girl. For well do I know that the beauty of Anette will also be the beauty of the little one, whom I shall call my daughter. But I have spoken with the spirits who guide my steps; I've been promised a son. I go now. Take care of Anette; should you fail in your promise, I'll return with many warriors and destroy this Post."

Looking up at me, the Colonel spoke sharply. "By heaven, you don't mean that, do you?"

Without answering his question, I turned and left. We mounted, rode slowly away from the Fort, and settlement.

TWO DAYS later, as we came in sight of the village, How and Red Hawk rode off with whoops of joy; they were again among their own. I knew, of course, why they rode off; they meant to bring tidings of the Eagle's return to his people. Riding down into the river breaks, I dismounted and ordered the Kid to get my warbag. A few minutes later, I stood before my two followers in full regalia, streaming warbonnet, and painted in colors becoming to the Eagle. I was ready again to enter the inner-circle of my people, all of whom had suffered severe storms and bitter cold, during the past winter, without my guidance.*

*The winter of 1886-87, was the most severe in the history of the West, and has never been forgotten by oldtimers yet living.

Mounting, I spoke to the Red One. "Does the Eagle look as if he might again become the leader of his people? Or is it that my brother does not wish to speak truly?"

Looking me over with critical eyes for a moment, he said, "Why, dawgone Chief, I ain't never seen yo' look better'n yo' does right now. Ain't that about right Kid?"

The Kid looked me over, a wistful expression in his eyes as he spoke. "Gosh, Chief, sure wish I could look near as imposin' as yo' do; then maybe—well, reckon it ain't no use fer me to do ary wishin' fer sure it be, I ain't ever gone'r be the man yo' be nohows. Yeah, Chief, yo' sure 'nough look a heap more'n a Chief."

"My friends have spoken well, but come, we must ride; my people will soon be riding to meet us." Again out into the open, we rode along the upper tablelands to where the trail was leading down to the lower flats of river bottom-land. Off in the distance, the faint, but welcome sound of tom-toms floated out over the flat-land. Stopping, I listened, then turned to my two followers. "My people are happy, for now they know that the Eagle and his followers have returned. Come, we must ride."

As we reached the lower flats, hundreds of mounted braves yelled as they raced their ponies at top speed, as if to see who would be the first to arrive at our side. Their shouts of joy filled the air as they came towards us, and kept racing around us in a solid circle yelling. "*Kin Wambi Yuha Ake Ku!*" (The Eagle has returned!) Paying them no attention, I continued toward the village; the Red One and the Kid followed, leading our pack-horses. While the braves continued their circling-movement, as if fearing we would break away, others chanted as they rode on both sides of us. They were happy for, as I learned later, many had thought I would never come back. As

we neared the village, Iron Bull followed by some of the elders, came riding towards us. Reining up, I looked towards the village whence women and children were now lining up, just outside. Tom-toms thundered loudly, followed by song from the women, shook rattles in time with the drums.

Riding up by the right side of my horse, Iron Bull raised his hand in greeting and spoke. *Kiciyuonhanpi Macinksi, Ikiciyuskin Hetata Ekta Tipe Mitawa.*" (Greetings my son, welcome back to my tepee.)

PLACING my hand over my heart, then raising it in token of his welcome, I spoke. "*miye Wambdi Ska Nape-yusa Atuku Ate Mitawa, Ka Mit-I'tokan Kin Omniciye Pe'ta Etanhan Kn Maka Ako Kin Kiinyang Kiyapi Mni Tukten, Tan'ka Otonwe Ci'stinna Ka Haska Wicasta Un Iyecen Ota Iyecen Kin Wato Sanpa Kin Tin'ta U'wo Iapi Heca Wanna.*" (I White Eagle, greet my father, and my people; I'll speak before the council-fire of lands beyond the running water, where there are many great villages, and pale-skin people are as many as the grass on the prairie; come, let's enter.)

Softly, the elders began chanting as we rode into the village I had left the fall before, to deliver the white girls to the safety of their people. They were home now, happy among their own; I too, was home, but I was not the happy one I should have been. I was worried, and lonely, longing for Anette. What the Colonel's wife had said, about Anette not being able to travel, had me in a state of mind I could not understand. Sioux women were strong; they could have their babies anyplace. They could travel on foot, or on horseback at all times. Thinking matters over, I decided that the women were weak.

Riding up in front of the lodge of Iron Bull, I saw the one I had called mother. She had been well fed, and fat when I left; but now she was thin, and looked as if her time on earth was drawing to a close. I said, "*Krcyuonhanpi Hun'ku Mitawa.*" (Greetings, my mother.) Looking up at me, she spoke no words. Dismounting, I went to her side, and spoke again. "*Hun'ku Mitawa Un Sni Tan'yan.*" (My mother is not well.) Taking her bony arm, I led her inside, and made her sit down, only then did she speak.

"You came back to your people." Standing silently, I looked into her faded eyes, and waited until she spoke again. "The frost moon brought us much snow, and cold, many became sick. Of the old ones, many died while my son was not here. Had the good spirits who follow my son, been here, none would have become sick and died. But when you rode away, the spirits rode with you. None were left to protect those of us left behind, none were here to make well the sick."

Halting for a moment, she spoke again. "Yes, I too, am sick; I am tired. I know that soon I must follow the trail of those long gone; but it will not matter, for you have returned. I'm glad, for now the ones who are sick will get well; they know that you, my son have returned. Is not this so?"

"Yes, my mother, the sick will arise with tomorrow's sun; they will become well. But you, my mother—the fat which covered your body when I left will not return. I see in your eyes that you will not again become well—The spirits of those who went before you are calling. They wish that you join them in that happier land, where all good people must some day go. You, my mother, must not fear."

Smiling up at me, she shook her old head. "Fear—no, my son, I've no fear. I'm ready, for my work here has been completed; and now that you have returned, I'm happy Yes, now I can travel the long trail in the knowledge that you, my son, will stay with your people. Yes, all will now be well."

I looked down at the old woman, as she sat there. Her head, covered with

snow-white hair, was moving from side to side, her fingers moving nervously as if working beads. Then I spoke. "Tell me, my mother, after you have gone from this earth, who will be here to make my clothing? In the past, my mother has made my warshirts, leggins and moccasins. Who will make them now?"

Smiling up at me, her wrinkled face showed much pain as she spoke. "My son will help me to my feet, I've not the strength to rise." I helped her up, while Iron Bull and others stood watching. I knew from the feel of her that her body was wasted to but skin and bone; it would be but a matter of time when she would cross over to that other land, not known to us the living.

With the aid of a stout willow-cane, she moved slowly to the corner where I knew she kept all of her finished garments. As she pulled the blanket aside, I saw it—more than I had ever seen in that same corner.

Speaking haltingly, she turned to me. "My son, all through the frost moons, I and another who loves you have worked to make you happy. This other one could not have you for her own; but in her sorrow, she wished only to make you happy."

Looking into her faded eyes, I asked. "Tell me, my mother, who is this woman?"

For a moment she kept silent, then she whispered the name of Dove In The Sky, the daughter of Standing Buffalo. Then, they had returned from Bear Butte Mountain to which I, in my anger, had sent them. As I turned to leave the old one cackled. "Dove In The Sky will never forget her love for the Eagle, even though she is now the wife of Red Robe. Go to her thank her; and she, too, will be happy."

MOVING outside I looked over the assembled braves and women who were gibbering delightedly to their excited children. In their eyes, I saw new hope, and happiness. Could all of this be because I had returned? Moving in among the braves, I spotted Tantanka Na'zinhannazin (Standing Buffalo). Walking to his side, I greeted him and asked. "Where's the daughter of Tantanka?"

Sadly, he pointed towards his lodge. "She hides in the lodge of her father, fearing the anger of the Eagle."

Placing my hand on the shoulder of Tantanka, I spoke slowly. "Tell me, you who carry the name of the Bull Buffalo, why does Dove In The Sky fear the Eagle? Must she hide because of what has long been forgotten? No, Tantanka; anger must again enter out hearts, for I've been told by the Spirits that soon I'll receive a son, whom I shall call *Wambi Kuyan* (Flying Eagle. Come, we shall enter the lodge of Tantanka."

Moving down to his lodge we entered; inside, against the far wall, stood Dove In The Sky. She did not look up as we entered. Going to her side, I placed my hand under her chin and raised her head; in her eyes I saw much sadness, and fear. "Tell me, why does the Dove hide from the Eagle? Is it that she fear the talons of the one I am told she still loves? Come, fear not; on this day I've anger for no one. Come, I wish to thank you, for I've found that in your heart there is much good."

She smiled now, her eyes shining, and I knew she would fear no more. Moving into the open, I spoke again. "Come walk by my side; let our people see that Tantanka and his daughter are still favored friends of the Eagle. Soon, much will be told, and much happiness will come to all of the Dakota."

Walking in among the assembled braves and women, I raised my hand for silence and spoke. "*Mitawa Wicasta, Miye Wambdi Ska Tawacin Oyaka Etanhan De Winochinca, Ta'ku I'ye Un Wanna Kin Cunwintku Etanhan Kin Woniya, Wakokipi Tawa Wocantewaste Un Nakim Mitawa.*"

(My people, I, White Eagle will speak of this woman, Dove In The Sky. She has had many sorrows, but she is now the favored daughter of the Sky Spirit. Treat her well, her happiness is also mine.)

Falling into my arms, she clung lightly to my body for a moment; then smiling, she ran off, and entered the lodge of Iron Bull who came over, placing his hand over my heart.

"My son has spoken well; much good and happiness will now enter the lodge of Tantanka. Look, my son, Tantanka is giving thanks to the Great Spirit."

Walking to the side of Standing Buffalo, who stood gazing into the sky, I placed my hand on his shoulder and spoke. "Tantanka speaks silent words? Or is it that the one who carries the name of the Great Bison sees better grazing in the sky?"

Facing me, he said, "The Eagle has made my daughter happy. I, too, am happy; for well do I know that from where the sun now stands, my lodge will again become a happy one. The spirits will now hold their guiding hands over the lodge of Tantanka Na'-zinhannazin. The Eagle speaks, and all becomes well; is not this so?"

"*Owgh, Koda,* all will now become well."

Walking away from him, I entered my lodge where I found the Kid in the act of unpacking. Tired as I was, I spread myself on a bed of buffalo-robes someone had spread out near the wall, and promptly fell asleep. When again I woke up, darkness was settling over the land. Beside my bed lay all of the beaded and quill-inlaid buckskin clothing I had seen in the lodge of Iron Bull. One, a warshirt decorated with claws from the eagle, and those of the mountain lion, took my fancy. This one, I knew, was made by the skillful hands of the Dove who stood smiling down at me as she spoke in that peculiar, silvery voice of hers.

"My master has slept long, and well; will not the Great One come and eat in the lodge of my father?"

Staring down at me, as if fearing I would refuse, she spoke again. "We've yet much of the food you gave us during the Wasasa and Capasapsaba Moons. Should you grant the wish of my father—a wish which is also mine —then forever will our lodge become a favored one by the ruling spirits."

Looking hopefully down at me, as I lay quietly on my robes, she spoke again. "My master does not speak. Is it that he is angry because I've entered his lodge?"

"No, I've no anger for the Dove. I was l o o k i n g at the beauty which is yours; also was I listening to the ring in your voice. While I was beyond the running water, I heard ringing of many bells during a time the haska, white people call Crixmas. Your voice has such a sound; only in you, it's much more beautiful. But the Dove must not again enter the lodge of the Eagle."

As I spoke the last words a sad, and hurt look had entered her eyes. "It's not I who wish it so; it's all-Seeing Eye of the one only I can see; it's he who'll become angry. I speak of the spirits within my lodge; better you go before a curse comes down upon you. But tell your father that the Eagle will eat of his food."

When she had left, the Kid, who had sat silent, got to his feet grinning.

"Gosh, Chief, yo' sure 'nough scared hell out'n the pore gal. Anyway, it was me as let 'er in. Golly, if she weren't already hitched to Red Robe, I maseff would marry, and hitch up with her. She sure is purty fer a squaw."

Looking over at the Kid, I spoke seriously. Tell me, how old is the one that we, for many moons, have known as the Kid? Could it be that he, as the Red One, wish to become a squawman, too?"

"We-ll, reckon a feller has to hitch up sometime, ain't he? And now as yo'n Red done went and got hitched,

reckon I orto hitch up, too. As I be lookin' at it, I be headin' close to bein' twenty four years old. Reckon that orto be old 'nough. I knows a heap of fellers back in Newbrasky as got hitched right durned young. One, a feller I knows right well, was only sixteen, and the gal no more'n fourteen. I be a heap older'n that. What say Chief?"

"Owgh, my friend is old enough. But in such matters, the one who wishes to take to himself a woman, must do so on his own accord. It's not for the Eagle, nor for others, to say. Find the woman you wish. Should she be willing, then if you wish, take her as your wife. But tell me, where is the Red One."

"Fur's ah knows Chief, reckon he be with his woman and kid; ain't seen hide or hair of'n 'im since we rode in."

"Good, while the Red One sleeps, we'll feast on Tantanka's food. Come, let's go to where food is waiting."

NEARING the lodge of Tantanka, I halted and pointed. "Look, my friend, the lodge of Tantanka is made from many tanned and oiled skins from the buffalo; his lodge is a large one. Should my friend take to himself a woman, he, too, must have a lodge in which to keep his own. It need not be as large as the one of Tantanka's, but a lodge you must have before you take to yourself a woman."

"Well, now, durn it, Red ain't got none, he's been hangin' up with the old folk ain't he?"

"The Red One is lazy. It is but fear of the Eagle that keeps Lone Bear from telling the Red One to make his own lodge. One day soon, I'll tell him to make one. But come, I feel the need for food." Moving on, I again halted and spoke. "Does my friend smell what I do?"

Looking suspiciously over at me, a puzzled look entered his eyes as he said. 'No, I ain't smellin' a durn thing."

Shaking my head, I spoke again. "My friend's nose, has not yet been trained in the knowledge of what lays before him. Does he know what the squaw of Tantanka is preparing for the Eagle, and his friend?"

"No, reckon I ain't knowin'; but since yo' done mentioned it, reckon I be smellin' grub."

"Yes, my friend is right; he does smell what he calls grub. But does he know that we'll be feasting on Pinspinza (Prairie Dog), squawbread, pemmican and squaw-corn, boiled in fat from the buffalo?"

Looking me over, a wry, and disgustful look on his face he says. "Gosh, no; if that's what they aim to shovel down our gullet, I ain't wantin' none of'n it. I ain't never eat dog; maybe I best not go in. I would be afeared to eat it."

Fearing I had killed his appetite, I spoke again. "Come, now, my friend must not fear the meat of the Pinspinza. They, like the buffalo, are vegetarians and gain their food from roots and plants. Their meat is good, but the smell while cooking is not a pleasant one. For myself, I care but little for the Pinspinza; but to the Dakota, it's something which must be served to the favored ones when they arrive. It's also said that meat from the Pinspinza brings to the ones who eat it much knowledge of the underground spirits; so fear not. From the Pinspinza you must eat; should you fail to give Tantanka the honor of serving you, as a friend of the Eagle, it will not be good. Come, let's enter."

While still in the lodge of Tantanka, a premonitory whisper entered my mind. This had happened many, many times throughout my life, but I've never been quite able to understand the cause of it. It was like some sixth-sense, which so often in the past, and without fail, had warned of danger. What was it that was now again whispering within my mind?

Since my early years, hunches—or whatever it may be—have followed me through life, always it seemed as if someone was whispering within my

mind. Was it the ghost of my father, whom I hadn't seen since the day I left home back in 1868? Or is it possible for a living person to possess supernormal senses? This, I do know: on the day father died, I knew it; and this in spite the fact I had absolutely no idea of where he was. And I was several hundred miles from where he had passed away. All of this was proven, in later years.

Of visions, I've had several, though I was never one who became addicted to the superstitions of the Indian. Where, then, did this psychic power come from? A fact it is, that many lives, including my own, were often saved by the warnings of that inner voice, which was now speaking within my mind warning of something about to happen, or to happen later. And so it was, while sitting in the lodge of Tantanka, that my mind had become completely absent from the present, so much so that I failed to hear the booming of tom-toms throughout the village.

Only when Tantanka spoke did I begin to come out of what was seemingly a trance. His voice at first, seemed to come from a distance; then I heard him plainly.

"Through the tom-toms, the old ones speak. They are calling the Eagle who must enter the circle, and speak of the strange lands, and villages beyond the running water, land of which we of the Dakota know nothing."

As I gave him no answer, he spoke again. "Does not the Eagle wish to speak before the council-fire?"

Rising slowly to my feet, I spoke. "It's not well for Tantanka to enter the thoughts of the Eagle, when the one who is greater than we speaks words within my mind. In the future, Tantanka will keep his peace while I listen to words spoken by the one no one sees."

Reaching the council, I entered the circle, and for a moment stood silent, then I spoke. "My father, my people, this night the Spirit has spoken of much sadness which will soon enter our village. What it is, I know not, but it is not good. I'll say no more, I must go to my lodge to wait, How, and the Hawk will speak of what they saw beyond the "Minisosi" (Missouri River). Of that which is to come, I know nothing yet; we can but wait till it strikes. Had Tantanka, in whose lodge I had feasted on the Pinspinza, kept his peace and not spoken, then well could it be I would have known. I go to enter my lodge; none must enter while I seek council with the one no one sees."

LEAVING the circle, I entered my lodge, spread myself on the buffalo-robes, and lay wakeful until early morn, when I dozed off into deep slumber. When again I woke up, I found the Kid, and the Red One standing above me. A broad grin on his freckled face, the redhead spoke. "Heard yo' done had another dream; hope it was a good one. Was it? Anyway, ain't nothin' happened yet, reckon maybe it ain't a-goin' to."

The Kid, who was a strong believer in all matters concerning spiritualism, shook his head at the Red One, and spoke angrily. "Now looky 'ere Red, yo' know a dang sight better'n callin' 'em dreams. Yo' has rambled with the Chief longer'n I has, so yo' orto know better'n callin' 'em dreams. Dang-bust it, I maseff was there, and saw the chief was plumb awake, fer as long as we was in Standin' Buffler's lodge. And anyway, I maseff, feels it a-comin'."

Getting to my feet, I spoke. "The Red One knows, but dare not speak with a straight tongue. Come, let us look at the one whose body lay still in death." (Here again it had come.) I had no idea that anyone had died; still, I walked directly to the lodge of Iron Bull, before which, many women had gathered. Entering, I found that the wife of my adopted father, had passed away, during the night. Her spirit was now waiting for the ceremonies accord-

ed the wife of a Chief, before she would be able to follow along the trail leading to that greater land of Odi Maka Cantewaste. The Red One, standing by my side, swore as he looked down at the still body of the old woman. "Well, Chief, reckon yore dream, or whatsomever it be, done come to pass."

Shaking my head, I spoke slowly. "The wisdom of my brother has many faults; he sees only what lies before him. That of which the voice spoke has not yet arrived; but it will come. As for what you see lying still in death, that won't matter; it's only the body that's dead. Her spirit lives, and well could it be she stands beside you in spirit; who knows?"

Looking around the lodge, the redhead hurriedly moved outside, muttering to himself as he left. "Dawg-gone, let me out'n 'ere afore I goes plumb loco. I ain't likin' dead folks none, and I ain't likin' them blasted spirits no better."

That was the last we saw of the redhead until late in the day. Coming to my side, Iron Bull asked, *"Masinksi, Un De Ta'ku Kin Woniya Canpahmihma Etanhan?"* (Is this what the spirit spoke of?) Shaking my head, I gave him my answer. *"Hiya, Atkuku Ate."* (No, my father.)

Leaving the lodge, I saddled up, and rode along the river. My mind was heavy with many thoughts, also I wondered. Where was Anette? Was she now on her way up the river? I could only guess. Dismounting inside the timber, I lay down beneath a large cottonwood, listening to the many sounds, and whispers brought about by the wind, as it blew through the upper branches of the trees. Now and then, a rabbit would come from out the underbrush, feeding as it moved along; clucking sagehens passed by within arm-length of me. All seemed peaceful as I lay waiting, and hoping that the voice within my mind would speak again. Then came the sound of horses. Jumping to my feet, I held the nose of my pony to keep him from whinnying. Standing well hidden among the timber, I saw some thirty painted "Hunkpapa Warriors" riding along in single file. Why, the warpaint? None were now at war; why then the paint of war?

When they had passed, I mounted and rode out over the plains. Reaching a high-point, I scoured the countryside for signs of other war-parties. Off to the west, a party of some forty more Indians rode, also in the direction of our village. I wondered—were they too painted for war? I didn't like the look of things, for well could it mean trouble.

For some years now, there had been no large war-parties roaming the plains. It was now eleven years since the Battle of the little Big Horn, but that meant nothing to the unruly who still wanted to fight; and well did I know that many of the Sioux, Cheyenne and Arapahoe tribes were still thinking in terms of driving the whites from their ancient hunting grounds. Also, I knew that these combined tribes had administered a terrific defeat to Custer, and almost destroyed the entire command of General Crook on the upper Rosebud, back in 1876. Now again, they were feeling their way toward unity and understanding among all tribes, with the intention of driving the whites from their country. I knew, well enough, that such a scheme could only end in defeat, and perhaps total destruction of the American Indian.

This, then, was what the warning voice had spoken of—or was it? It had me puzzled, and worried; for well did I know that, in our village, there were many who had fought against both Custer, and General Miles. I wondered, would they again be willing to fight for what I knew would be a lost cause against the superior arms of white troops? Riding off, I soon reached the village where I found Iron Bull, and others in consultation with the Hunkpapa Sioux. As I neared them, Iron Bull hailed for me to stop; but I con-

tinued riding as if I didn't see them. Reaching my lodge, I dismounted and entered. Inside, I found both the Red One and the Kid. Paying them no attention, I squatted on my robes, and listened to the redhead blowing off to the Kid.

"We-ll son, maybe I ain't rightly knowin', but somhows, when I sees redskins painted fer war, I allus figgers it means a heap of trouble. So, as I be seein' it, we orto head out'n 'ere fer sur 'nough it ain't smellin' good a tall; smells a heap like trouble a comin'."

Calling the Red One's attention I spoke. "Often, my brother speaks with the wagging tongue of the magpie. I have spoken of a voice from the one no one sees, and my brother laughs, and calls it a dream; and now, when trouble is arriving, my brother becomes rabbit, and wants to run. Have we not faced greater dangers than what face us now? Owgh, run if you wish; but I stay to destroy the hopes of those who wish to make trouble for my people."

I had no more, than spoken the last word, when Iron Bull entered, excitement written on his face as he spoke savagely. *"Winconte Yuha En Ya Unkitawapi, Otonwa Ej'Stinna, Kin Woniya Yuha Canpahmihma A'Wicakehan."* (Death has again entered our village; the Spirits have spoken truly.)

FOLLOWED by the others, I moved into the open, and stode to where death-cries from the women sounded. Entering the circle of braves, I ordered the women removed. Looking over the assembly, I saw much which was not to my liking: Painted Hunkpapa and Minneconjou warriors. Also, there were several Arapahoe braves, but these were painted with signs of a peaceful mission. Two of them I knew; they were Black Otter and Iron Horse, with whom I had hunted, and fought by their side while making raids on the Crows in Montana territory. Five dead Sioux lay on the ground. I had grown up with each of the five, from boyhood to manhood; now they lay still in death. Deep sorrow entered my heart, as I looked down at their still bodies. There was Tall Bull; next to him lay Young Bear, Spotted Tail, Swift Bear and Circling Hawk. Four others lay dead; they were of the Arapahoe tribe, and unknown to me.

Moving to my side, Black Otter, and Iron Horse greeted me with these words. "To the Eagle, we come to bring greetings, and presents from our Chief, Po'ge Pi'sto (Sharp Nose). Fine ponies we had, but we stand empty-handed before the Eagle.While men took them, while they were killing your people, and mine. We have brought death, but of ponies we have none; it is with sorrow in our hearts that we greet the Eagle."

Placing my hands on each of the two, I spoke. "Black Otter, and Iron Horse will not grieve; soon the ones who have killed, and stolen what your Chief had sent to make happy the heart of the Eagle, will rot in the sun We shall ride till we have found and destroyed them."

Turning to the warlike Hunkpapa and Minneconjou warriors, I spoke again. "You came, to seek allies to fight the paleface. Good, we'll fight; but only against those who have destroyed the ones who lay still in death before you. We'll not fight against those who wish us no harm.

"And listen, you of the Minneconjou and Hunkpapa Sioux, for I shall now speak truly. We'll not fight against the Great White Father's soldiers; to do so would mean destruction of the Sioux Nation. We cannot now, or ever again, hope to win against guns firing many bullets, and cannons firing shells that kill many with but one shot. It is not I alone who know this. How and Red Hawk know, for while beyond the running water of the "Minisosi", we found that the paleface are as many as the grass on the prairie. They are many; we are but few. Yes, I know you have many warriors, hiding in the

badlands along the "Wakpacansoka" (Little Missouri). They are not enough. We can kill a thousand paleface, but ten thousand more will come; they will continue to come, till the last Sioux, and their allies lie beneath the soil. No, if you wish to follow and help destroy the ones who destroyed those of my people, and the Arapahoe who lay silent in death before you, then make ready; we ride at once."

Turning to the Red One, I spoke again. "Should my brother also wish to ride, he will make ready, and you Kid; make ready Arapahoe."

Darkness was settling over the land, as we rode swiftly toward Bad River, where the attack had been made by the raiders. Reaching the river just before break of day, I called a halt, to rest our horses. An hour later, as the sun rose over the eastern Horizon, I mounted and took a look over the long line of nearly 300 warriors now mounted. Calling Black Otter, I told him to lead the way to where the attack had taken place.

Crossing over the river, he led the way along Frozen Man's Creek, and pointed as he spoke. "Here we camped, when white men fired into our midst, and ran our ponies off."

Checking the ground, surrounding the vacated campsite, I soon found a broad trail, over which many horses had traveled. Waving to my followers, I sent a dozen young braves ahead, to scout the country before us. When they were well on their way, we followed.

For two days we rode, crossing the Cheyenne River and followed the trail along the Belle Fourche. On the third day, the trail led away from the river, and cut toward Baldy and St, Onge Peaks. The trail was much plainer now; I knew our quarry was not far away. Calling a halt, I waited for reports of the scouts. Toward sundown, they rode in, reporting that the raiders were camped near St. Onge Peak, with more than a hundred head of horses.

The country surrounding the peak was well known to all of us. We would wait for total darkness, before moving closer, from where we could make our attack just before dawn. The time to avenge our dead, and again regain our horses, was drawing near.

Watch for the next story in this series. It will appear in an early issue.

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GAMBLER'S DESTINY

by Harlan Clay

John Huffager never dreamed, when he fled from that posse that he'd soon be back-tracking, trying just as desperately to find his pursuers!

THE GAME at the corner table reached its climax at midnight. John Huffager shoved his last stack of blues into the center of the green felt and smiled confidently behind a full house, aces up. The bearded man across the table smiled also as he matched the bet. Slowly he spread down four queens. Huffager stared hard at the queens, flipped his full house into the discards, and stood up. "The ladies," he said half aloud, "win again."

The gambler picked his way through the dancing couples in the middle of the saloon floor and made his way to the bar. He leaned heavily on the scarred mahogany "Rye," he said flatly.

The little bartender shoved him a bottle and glass. "How's it goin' tonight, Huffager?"

Huffager poured a glass of the white liquor and gulped it. "It's finished," he said. "I lost twenty-five thousand."

"That's an unfortunate end after you've been winnin' like a house afire all week," the bartender said sympathetically.

"That's fate," Huffager said. "It builds you up till you think th' world is yours, and then it sends four ladies to clean yuh out in five minutes just to prove it's still boss."

The barkeep looked puzzled but solemnly agreed.

A blonde-haired dance hall girl in a low-cut silver evening dress appeared at Huffager's side and looped her arm through his. "Come on, gambler," she said. "You can dance away your worries."

John Huffager's face hardened and his gray eyes mirrored a strange bleakness. "No, thanks," he said quietly. "I don't dance."

The girl put her hand on his shoulder, leaving white powder traces on his black coat. "I'm a good teacher," she said.

Huffager pulled his arm away from

the woman and turned to leave. "Sorry," he said. "Not tonight."

The woman's eyes blazed with catlike fury. "So I ain't good enough for you!" she screamed and slapped the gambler across the cheek. The blow popped sharply and in the sudden silence that blanketed the saloon, the gambler could feel a hundred eyes focused on him. He flushed angrily and stalked toward the batwing doors.

Without warning a burly giant grabbed Huffager roughly from behind and spun him around. The man swayed, half drunk, his small eyes blazing fiercely. "Not so fast, tinhorn," he snarled. "Yuh can't insult Lil without answerin' tuh Hank Moore personally." He swung awkwardly at the gambler's head.

"You're not hard to answer," Huffager replied quietly and hit Moore hard in the mouth. The man staggered backward, a thin trickle of blood trailing down his chin.

"Damn yuh, gambler, say yore prayers!" Moore shouted. He went for a forty-five belted on his hip.

Huffager's thin fingers were deft at more than cards. His hand streaked for a shoulder holster. Blue steel flashed in the saloon light and a line of orange flame penciled from his forty-four. Hank Moore's gun roared a split second later but the impact of Huffager's bullet jerked his fire harmlessly to one side. Moore swayed a moment like a great jack pine under a woodsman's axe. The forty-five slipped from his hand and his eyes glazed. He fell heavily and did not move.

HUFFAGER shifted his eyes from the fallen man to the silent occupants of the saloon, then shoving his gun back into his holster, he pushed through the batwing doors and stepped onto the board sidewalk outside. The silence of the saloon was immediately broken by a jumble of voices that increased swiftly to a great roar. The little bartender burst through the door and ran to Huffager.

"You'd best clean out of town quick like," he said excitedly. "That crowd in the saloon is comin' after you!"

Huffager wheeled. "For what reason?" he snapped. "Moore started th' scuffle and he went for his gun first. If I hadn't done what I did, I'd be lyin' there instead of him."

"No matter," the barkeep pleaded. "You got to get away fast. Professional gamblers are about as popular as rattlesnakes in this town and Moore had a lot of friends. They're apt to string you up and not take time to figure you done right 'til afterward."

Weight was added to the barkeep's words by a crowd of men boiling out of the saloon. One of them had a coiled rope in his hands. Huffager stood undecided for a brief moment, debating whether to make more gun play or take the bartender's advice. There was one sensible thing to do and he did it. With a little jump Huffager straddled a blaze-faced roan standing by the hitching post and headed down the dark street.

He heard men cursing and he felt a few random bullets whiz past his head, but worse than that, he heard the cry go up. "Get the sheriff and organize a posse!"

The lights of Pokeville were a few tiny pinpoints in the distance before John Huffager slackened the speed of his borrowed mount. He eased the roan into a canter, rolled himself a cigaret, and then turned his thoughts to the events of the night. He'd been expecting a blow-up ever since he hit Pokeville a week ago. He hadn't known why or how it would come but he had known that there would be a woman mixed up in it some way. There always was.

Huffager had his first trouble with women five years ago. He had protected a girl's crooked father and gone to prison in his place because he loved

the girl and wanted to save her family from disgrace. When he returned after his year at Yuma, he found that the girl had married another man. That incident separated Huffager from friends and society he had known before. He became a drifter and a gambler but there was one shadow from his past that always remained to haunt him—trouble because of women.

He first remembered noticing the jinx in Tombstone. He had helped a lady across a street ankle deep in mud and had been shot through the shoulder two days later by her jealous and drunken husband. Six months later in Abilene he lost his bankroll in a poker game. The next day he learned that the dance hall girl who leaned over his shoulder while he played had given his opponents information about the cards he held. Broke, he had drifted to Dodge City and there was accused by a lady cafe owner of robbing her place of business. He had spent six months in jail because of her false accusation. There had been other places and other women and in each place he came to grief because of them. The events of tonight were another link in the chain. If it hadn't been for four queens, he would be twenty-five thousand dollars richer. And if it hadn't been for the loud-mouthed dance girl, he would not be on the drift again with a posse at his back and a stolen horse beneath him.

John Huffager snapped out of his reverie when the cigaret burned his fingers. He listened closely to a sound in the distance and swore as he recognized the muffled drum of horses' hoofs. The posse was on his trail! Huffager tickled the roan's flanks and moved forward at a fast gallop.

TEN MINUTES later the sound in the distance told Huffager that the posse was gaining. He rode to the top of a grassy hill and halted. In the distance he could make out the shadowy forms of the hunting pack thundering over the ground he had just ridden across. The moon was climbing higher now and Huffager knew that they would spot him soon. Unless he found a place to hide it was only a matter of minutes until the posse's bullets would cut him down.

At the bottom of the hill a deep washout surrounded by mesquite weeds caught Huffager's eyes and prodded him into action. He forced the rebellious mount into the gulch and hunched down flat in the saddle. He waited for five torturous minutes while the sound of approaching horsemen pounded louder in his ears. Finally he risked a glance through the thick bushes and saw the posse on top the rise of the hill. They swept down the slope and veered to the right of the gulley, not one of the riders turning his glance toward it. Huffager heaved a relieved sigh and took note of some of his pursuers. The bright moonlight clearly revealed the figure of Sheriff Behan and the bouncing form of rotund little Doc Walters, special deputy of Pokeville on top of his medical duties. The posse disappeared over another hill before Huffager could identify more of the men.

Huffager swung the roan out of the gulch and even managed to whistle a little as he headed off in the opposite direction from the posse. He stopped whistling, however, when he began to wonder what kind of woman would get him into trouble in the next place he landed.

JOHN HUFFAGER shied away instinctively at the sight of the dark run-down ranch house that loomed ahead of him out of the night. But a second and more reasoned thought caused him to draw rein and turn the roan back in the direction of the house. He hadn't eaten any supper and he would probably be on horseback for one hundred miles or more before

he got to where he would get food and drinking water. The only smart thing to do now was to take a chance on buying some grub from the ranch house.

The house was shrouded in darkness. Huffager looked at his watch and saw that it was after one o'clock. Some thick-skinned old rancher was going to be damned provoked when he started helloing the house.

Huffager called out several times in his best voice announcing according to rangeland custom that he was a friend. Bringing no light from within, he dismounted and pounded on the front door. Still no signs of life showed themselves. Huffager took his life in his hands and pushed the door open. He called out again and received no answer. Damn funny! If no one was at home, maybe he could find some grub and leave money for it.

The gambler struck a match and spotted an oil lamp on a nearby table. He lit the lamp and taking it in his hand, started to search the house. Suddenly a low moan coming from an adjoining room froze Huffager in his tracks. Instinctively his hand went to the holstered gun under his armpit, but he drew it away quickly. Breaking in like this was bad enough. To handle artillery might be fatal.

The moan came again and an uncontrollable curiosity drove Huffager to the half open door through which the sound came. What he saw caused John Huffager's heart to turn over the wrong way and the lamp to juggle precariously in his hands. Lying on the bed in the room was a pretty black-haired young woman! Her eyes were closed and her breath came in irregular gasps. Huffager knew that she was unconscious.

The gambler groaned. A woman meant only one thing—trouble, trouble for him. An almost overpowering desire to get out of the house with the speed of light surged through him. He turned from the door, but an even stronger power inside of him made him stop. There was a sick woman alone in the house, maybe dying, and he was sneaking off like a cowardly coyote.

Huffager squared his shoulders and went into the room with the sick woman.

SHE MOVED slightly as if she knew that someone was in the room. Her lips moved but no words came forth. Huffager placed his hand on the woman's forehead and found that it was burning with fever. At the touch of his hand she opened her eyes and stared vacantly at him. Huffager saw that her pupils were yellowish and bloodshot. "Doctor," she whispered. "Is it you, doctor?"

Huffager found a small cloth and soaked it in a basin of cool water. He laid the cloth across the woman's forehead. "The doctor's comin'," he said. "You just hang on a little longer."

The gambler left the ranch house quietly and swung into the saddle. Speed was essential now for he knew that the woman was sinking fast. It was going to be plenty risky but he would have to ride back to Pokeville and get Doc Walters. If he could sneak in, ethics would prevent the doctor from informing the town of his presence. A picture of the fat little medico lashed across his mind and he suddenly felt cold needles prick his spine. Hell and damnation! He had seen Doc Walters riding with the posse that was chasing him not twenty minutes ago.

John Huffager began to laugh, a low, mirthless laugh. This was fine. Fate had gone out of its way to cook up a good one for him this time. He had escaped from the posse that had been hunting for him but now, because of a woman, he would have to start hunting for the posse! Of course he could forget about finding the doctor and let the woman in the ranch house die, but the gambler knew that he

would rather take a chance on stretching hemp than to go through life knowing that he was that brand of coward.

THE MOON was still high when John Huffager reached the gulch he had hidden in an hour before. The trail of the posse was cold but the gambler struck out in the general direction they had followed. He rode the roan hard, sitting straight in the saddle so that his card-sharp eyes could spot any moving figures on the sloping hills.

An hour later Huffager was in the mountain foothills. He shivered and cursed himself for a fool as the sharp night air cut through his thin suit. The whispering wind in the scrub pines seem to be agreeing with him. But he rode on and strained his eyes for some sign of life.

It was his ears, however, that spotted the posse first. The muffled drum of horses' hoofs that he had heard earlier in the evening again came to him. Huffager drew rein until he could make certain the direction the posse was moving. He swung around then and headed toward the sound.

In ten minutes the gambler spotted the shadowy silhouettes of the possemen coming over the top of a hill half a mile away. Huffager moved directly into the path of the riders, halted his mount behind a thick juniper bush, and waited with drawn gun.

The posse was moving slowly now which, Huffager calculated, was a good thing for his desperate plan. The men were passing him now and he could hear them grumbling about their poor luck. Huffager placed a soothing hand on the roan's neck to keep it from jumping. The surprise element meant everything if he was to come out of this little scheme alive.

As the last of the riders passed him, Huffager spurred the roan vigorously out into the open and sent a shot screaming over the heads of the men. "Hoist yore mitts!" he snarled. "And th' first gent to turn around gets a bellyful of lead!"

A hunted man with a gun at your back is a hard hombre to bargain with. As Huffager's words sang out there was a stamping of horses' feet and a general cursing, but there was also ten pair of hands stuck high in the air.

"Now," Huffager commanded. "One at a time. Take yore guns out and drop them on the ground."

The gambler supervised the dropping of the guns until the ground was covered with rifles and pistols. "All right now," he said affably. "Maybe I can talk to Doc Walters there in peace. There's a sick woman in a tumbled-down old ranch house over on the north range. She's there all alone and she's gonna die if she don't get a medico to look after her quick. Sorry I can't show you the way, doc, but you oughta know where th' place is. I even left a lamp burnin' in the window. You'd better move pronto. So long, fellas. You'd better go with th' doc."

Suddenly a rifle cracked through the silence and Huffager felt a searing pain burn across his side. He wheeled and saw four horsemen bearing down upon him from the top of the hill. The gambler flattened in the saddle and spurred the roan forward. He was a fool to forget that the posse might be split up and that his shot would bring the other bunch at top speed.

Another shot hummed past Huffager's head and then the posse that he had held up dropped to the ground and

went for their guns. Bullets that whirred like angry hornets sailed past the gambler as he drove for the rocky protection of some boulders ahead. Just as he thought he might make it, his horse squealed with pain, stumbled, and plunged headlong to the ground. Huffager somersaulted ahead of the fallen animal and lay flat on the damp earth. This was the end of the trail, he knew.

Haffager groped for the gun he had lost while falling and found it a few feet away. He fired once at the oncoming possemen in a vain effort at self-defense. A hail of shots answered his challenge. One bullet creased his cheek and he felt something tear into his body. It did not hurt. It seemed more like a cold piece of ice. A picture of the black-haired girl he was trying to save flashed across his mind. Then the cold feeling in his stomach turned to red hot pain and everything went black.

THE FIRST thing John Huffager saw when he opened his eyes was the black-haired girl. Her eyes were closed just as he had seen her at the ranch house. He groaned. He couldn't get away from women even when he was dead. He looked up, then, and saw fat little Doc Walters standing over him.

"Feeling better?" Walters asked with a smile.

"I thought I was dead," Huffager admitted.

"You should be." the doctor said. "You had three slugs in you. But you must be rawhide clear through, because you're gonna pull through easy enough."

For the first time, Huffager noticed that he was on a cot and that the girl was lying on a bed next to him.

Doctor Walters read the puzzled look on the gambler's face. "You're in Pokeville's one-room hospital," he said. "After your little run-in with the posse we picked you up and went on to see if you were telling the truth about the girl at the ranch house. They thought you were lyin'. After we found her there, th' boys in th' posse all branded themselves first class heels and appointed me as a one-man committee to tell you that you're welcome in this town from now to kingdom come. When they saw that you had risked your life to save th' girl's, they were men enough to admit there was nothing wrong with a gent who would do that.

"I'm hopin' that you'll hang your hat in this town permanently, Huffager," the doctor concluded. "We need men like you here."

Huffager grinned wider than he had in over a year. At last he had broken the woman trouble jinx. Now he could settle down in a town that he really liked and live the life of a decent citizen whom everyone respected. His eyes shifted to the girl who had indirectly made all of this possible. "Who is she and how is she, Doc?" he asked.

"She's going to get well," he said. "Her name is Mary Stiles. Her dad died two years ago and she's been tryin' to run that ranch with th' help of two shiftless hombres. They left her the other day but she was so sick then she couldn't come into town to hire more help. That's why no one knew she was sick. I'm sort of Mary's godfather. Been tellin' her that she ought to get married and turn over that ranch runnin' job to a man."

The doctor looked at Huffager. "Mary was awake a while ago and looked at you mighty curiously. How much do you know about running a ranch son?"

John Huffager shifted his eyes to look at the girl. With her raven black hair and soft olive skin, he reckoned that she was one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen. "I was born on a ranch, Doc," he said.

TEXAS' STRANGE CIVIL WAR BATTLE

by Lawrence Hunnicutt

RUINS OF an adobe fort, only a short distance from the present site of Amarillo, Texas was the scene of a strange double-victoried Civil War battle. It was a victory for the South, and also a great triumph for the Union Forces. Details of the battle, as well as the expedition leading up to it, were recorded in an officer's diary.

In the summer of 1864, the stubborn and relentless pressure of the Southern Forces were keeping the Union Armies very busy defending cities, factories, and supplies. This left Northern frontier area without army protection. The massing of Indians to kill and plunder along this frontier would have meant that Northern Forces would have to be pulled out of the battle and protect the frontier. Washington realized there was a hole in its defense. It also heard rumors that Rebel leaders were making plans to talk to the Indians about uniting for such raids.

Thus, the issue turned into a strategic hot potato and was pitched to General J. H. Carleton, Union Commander at Santa Fe, New Mexico. He immediately passed the buck to Colonel Kit Carson, the famous Indian fighter and scout. He did more than pass the buck to Carson; he ordered Carson to lead an expedition in battle against the Kiowas, Comanches, and Plains Apache Indians of the Northern Texas Panhandle area.

The Indian-fighter decided that the best solution was to work with the Indians of the Mountain regions. Fanning the flames of hostility between the Mountain Indians and the Plains Indians would not be difficult; this would prevent a large-scale combination against such Union outposts as Colorado, Kansas and New Mexico. Carson got the help of the Utes and Mountain Apaches, after promising them clothes, buffalo robes and the excitement of plunder. Seventy-five

Utes and Mountain Apaches packed guns, quivers, arrows, bows and glaring war paint for the trip.

Carson gathered the expedition at Fort Bascom, New Mexico, in November 1864. Fort Bascom was north of the present town of Tucumcari, New Mexico; the Fort was located on the south side of the Canadian River. Besides the braves, Carson had 21 officers and 317 soldiers. His entire expedition consisted of less than five hundred men, twenty-seven wagons, two howitzers and one ambulance. On the trip, most of the men rode horses or wagons but some of them had to walk. This slowed the expedition down to about fifteen miles a day.

After several days marching the situation got tense because of the strange mixture of company. Each night, the braves held ceremonies, and made medicine in preparation for their coming battle. This kept the white soldiers on edge and a bit jumpy. The Indians' ability to signal each other from great distances, and see in the dark, didn't help taut civilized nerves, either.

An example of this occurred when some Indian scouts were returning to camp; they had been scouting about ten miles ahead of the main party. It was about dusk, when they were returning. The white soldiers could barely see them, but the braves in camp were getting very excited when the scouts were still about two miles away. The braves in camp had picked up the signals of the scouts that the Plains Indians' camp had been found. The enemy was about a day's journey ahead of the Carson expedition.

QUICKLY, Carson made his plans for battle by picking a special group of men to ride all night. He left the infantry and wagons in charge of another officer, who was to bring them up the following morning; the mounted men and the howitzers moved out that

night. About dawn the following morning, Carson's small band contacted the Plains Indians and won a skirmish. After the battle, valuable time was lost as the Mountain Indians divided horses and plunder of the Plains Indians. When they got started again, Carson drove on down the Canadian River past a small settlement of Plains Indians and into the adobe ruins of an old trading post. It had been built to double as a fort in case of Indian attack. The walls still offered a little protection.

About 10:00 o'clock, on the morning of November 20, 1864, the battle at the adobe fort began. The Indians attacked in bunches, and Carson's two howitzers ruined the attacks. The battle was confusing, in its early stages. The Plains Indians had a bugler named Satank. Each time Carson's bugler blew, "charge", Satank sounded, "retreat"; after Carson's soldiers, realized what was happening they laughed at this. About mid-afternoon, the Indians stopped attacking in bunches; they fanned out during the attack, making the howitzers practically useless.

To make the situation worse, the Plains Indians had sent in men to get back their horses and plunder, while others kept the Union Forces busy with gunfire. When Kit Carson realized what was happening, he found that he was in hot water up to his ears. His

men were hungry; they had not eaten for nearly two days. He was pinned down and separated from his main force, which was coming up, unaware of the death trap it was walking into.

Realizing that he was licked, Colonel Carson started retreating It was an orderly retreat, fighting as it went, with the two howitzers bringing up the rear to discourage further raids from that point. The retreat was slowed more by the manner Carson conducted it; for greater safety he had three men walk as a fourth man rode horseback.

Carson's men were sneaking through the tall native grass in their retreat. The Plains Indians set fire to the grass, and Carson had to seek high ground as the winds favored the Plains Indians. Once, during this move through the grass, one of Carson's men suddenly came face-to-face with one of the Plains Indians. They both fired but it was the Carson man who came away the winner.

During the remaining daylight hours, Carson's men held out against the attacks. They kept up their retreat, and just after dark they contacted the wagon train and the other men That night, some of the men slept; but a double guard was thrown about the camp to prevent a surprise attack. The next morning the men ate, for some of them it was their first meal in nearly three days. They also continued their retreat, and got back to Fort Bascom a few days before Christmas 1864. The Plains Indians had watched them most of the way, but did not attack again after Kit Carson made contact with his main force.

Although the battle had been lost, the objective was accomplished. The wedge had been thoroughly driven between the Plains and the Mountain Indians, so there could be no mass uniting to raid frontier settlements on a large scale. The plans of the Union Armies would not have to be changed to cope with such an uprising.

After getting safely back to Fort Bascom, Carson was asked if he would go back and finish the job of beating the Plains Indians. He answered, "Yes, if you will give me 10,000 men."

Half the time she wanted to kiss Morgan, and the other half she was ready to kill him. For Morgan was a sheep-rancher, opposed by

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DON'T BELIEVE THOSE WILD TALES

by E. E. Clement

IN JANUARY, 1848, when certain breath-taking glitters of yellow were observed in the tailrace of a mill being constructed for Captain John A. Sutter of California, Frederick Vincent Stephens, a lanky freckle-faced youth, was employed as clerk in San Francisco.

Fred Stephens went to work on January 24th, the official discovery date—and for quite a while thereafter—without thinking any more about the Pacific Coast than was necessary to work on forms which would establish credit association with the new banks springing up in the territories so recently wrested from Mexico.

He was happy; he had a good job, which paid ten dollars a week for only six days of work; he had prospects of a raise to twelve, and perhaps, after a while, fifteen dollars. This would enable him to marry a young lady he had met on a vacation trip to Brooklyn.

Of course, being young, Fred Stephens occasionally regretted the lack of adventure in his life; he read the reports in Greeley's *New York Tribune* of explorations in Africa and pioneering in Nevada. He sighed wistfully—one was just as inaccessible as the other.

No, far better to concentrate on Greeley's masterful editorials on the slavery question, on The Free-Soil Party—this was an election year and Stephens' employers were Whigs. If he wanted to get ahead, he had to keep up with the *important* events in the world.

Stephens went to work and saved money to visit his girl again in May; the journey to Brooklyn was long and expensive. He was so happy to see her, it probably wouldn't have excited him one bit to learn that, by then, almost every Californian who enjoyed the use of at least one of his legs had taken up residence in and around the site of

Sutter's Mill. No, sir, it wouldn't have excited him one bit...

While Central and South Americans, sailors and trappers, scrambled into the gold fields, the East and the Middle West shrilled on about their private affairs, completely unaware of the bonanza.

Slowly, very slowly, the fantastic news inched its way east along almost non-existent lines of communication. Rumors drifted into New York from seamen, from out-of-town visitors, that something spectacular had happened "out Californy way," but Stephens was a citizen of the most skeptical city in the world.

Gold in California? He chuckled. That was like the immigrants sweating up out of the holds of ships that landed at the Battery, blissfully certain that they could live on what they would chip from the gold-and-silver paved streets of the metropolis. Gold stories were for hicks and suckers, said Frederick V. Stephens, who now was working in a bank near New York's Bowling Green.

He knew about gold, and how little of it there was in the country. As a young man who wanted to rise in the banking world, he read the commercial notes on *The Tribune* very carefully. As late as September 6th, he had read this latest report:

> *We learn from a return made to the Treasury by the Director of the Mint that the deposits of gold derived from our own mines for coinage have amounted from 1824 to 1847 to about half a million dollars per year. The gold-yielding states, named in what would seem to be the order of their productiveness, are North Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, South Carolina, Alabama and Tennessee. The annual product...appears to be very irregular.*

No, if Frederick Vincent Stephens wanted to be a rich man, he had to work hard, get regular small raises through the years and save his money. With luck he might have a thousand dollars in his own name by the time he was thirty. This he might invest or use to start a small business. Dull? Yes, but he was a lot better off than many people he knew.

On Saturday morning, September 16th, young Stephens opened his *Tribune* and read something that made his security and careful plans turn to slippery mud under his feet. Under the subdued headline *"California—Two Views Of It,"* were a pair of letters from the western territory.

Stephens read the shorter letter first and smiled over its description of the beautiful "females" in California. Then, he glanced carelessly at the other —a reprint of a message to the *Philadelphia North American* from someone whose initials were W. C.

There was a paragraph about mining—quicksilver or mercury seemed to be plentiful out west—, and there was a mention of—of—!

> *But a recent gold discovery has thrown all others into the shade ...particles of gold—resembling in shape snow flakes. A person will collect...from one to two ounces of gold a day. There are probably now not less than 5,000 persons, whites and Indians, fathering this gold. San Francisco: Sonoma, Santa Cruz and San Jose are literally deserted by their inhabitants; all have gone to the gold regions. The farmers have thrown aside their plows, the lawyers their briefs, the doctors their bills, the priests their prayer books, and all are now digging gold. The diamond-brooched gentleman and the clouted Indian work side by side, lovingly, as if they had been rocked in the same cradle..."*

THE BANK clerk wiped some moisture from his upper lip and clenched the paper more tightly. All about him, on narrow downtown Broadway, other men had collected in little groups around *Tribunes*.

A very large company left Monterey today for the gold scene—some on horses, some in wagons, some on foot, and some on crutches. As soon as the news reaches Oregon, we shall have a large emigration from that quarter. Nobody thinks of fighting here any longer—the natives have gone for gold, the sailors have run from the ships, and the soldiers from their camps. The last vessel that left the coast was obliged to ship an entire new crew...

There followed a discussion of military developments, the need for civil authority in the new region and the suprisingly high beef and mutton production. The last paragraph, however, carried a mind-tingling after-thought: *"Your streams have a few minnows in them and ours are paved with gold!"*

With difficulty, Fred Stephens turned the page and began reading the editorial on the famine in Ireland: but after reading three meaningless sentences, he flipped back, went over the letter again.

There was an anecdote in it he hadn't noticed before: a man who had spent six days in the Sacramento Valley had washed out five hundred dollars worth of the yellow stuff. Five hundred dollars! Stephens computed rapidly. Why, he only made five hundred and twenty dollars a *year!*

He found it very difficult to concentrate on ledgers that morning, even though Mr. Terman, the second vice-president, insisted that "one swallow does not make a spring," that these crazy booms had been started before by irresponsible newspaper accounts and that he, for one, was going to change to *The Evening Post*.

After lunch, Mr. Terman told Fred that Hagerty, the senior clerk, had resigned to go out west and hunt for gold. Hagerty's position would now be his, with a raise to twelve dollars a week, effective immediately.

Fred thanked the vice-president for the raise and went back to his desk envying Hagerty.

It was hard to go to sleep at night with the thought of all that wealth lying in the ground just waiting to be uncovered; it was hard to keep your mind on business matters. Stephens tried to drive the thought of the precious metal out of his head, but all his friends, his landlady, his family, everyone he knew, talked about these days was gold. There was *gold* in California!

He went to see his girl in Brooklyn. She agreed with Mr. Terman that the whole business was just a wild rumor that had gotten out of hand. He was making twelve dollars a week now; he wanted to be especially sober and industrious. Very soon, they would be able to get married. But there was a faraway look on her face whenever she sneered at the mention of California.

Fred Stephens managed to work himself into his old routine. He disregarded the disappearances of friends, the sight of men plodding down to the harbors with a few possessions and precious digging tools on their backs. He read the much more conservative *Evening Post*.

Wednesday evening, September 20, 1848, was a hard day at the little bank near Bowling Green. People kept rushing in and withdrawing large sums for their accounts. Two of Stephens' fellow clerks quit without asking for their pay. He knew that the *Tribune* had carried some sensational news that day, but he kept a tight grip on himself. He wouldn't read the ridiculous sheet.

He bought his *Evening Post* when

he left work that night and stopped short in front of the building as he saw the crowd of men arguing over their newspapers. He looked down at the first page of the *Post*. It reported the arrival of Edward E. Beale from Commodore Jones' squadron anchored at La Paz.

Beale brought new of what he called "the real, the new" El Dorado. He told of whalers on the west coast suspending operations, of captains sending their men off to the field bound by a promise to sell them the gold they mined at ten dollars an ounce—thus making a seven-dollar profit. He described the wholesale, frenzied evacuation of towns, the death of two newspapers as compositors dropped their mallets and charged off with picks.

Stephens, who was gulping hard in spite of the quiet and dignified journalism, went on to Thomas A. Larkin's famous letter to the Secretary of the Navy—dated back in July—which Beale had brought with him.

> *It is supposed that the banks and bottoms of all these small streams contain vast quantities of gold, and rich with the same metal. The people are now working at many places, some are eighty miles from the others.*

Larkin explained the simplicity of mining operations, from pan-prospecting to the simple dredges which were being built. The clerk heard a man near him exclaim at how easily it would be to build such a contraption, before he noticed—*"some small companies of five to eight men had machines from which they anticipate five or six hundred dollars a day."* The words glared up at Stephens with all the brilliance of the future.

ALL THE way down Broadway, Fred saw clusters of men standing and discussing with a strange, urgent quality to their voices. *"Overland route's best—" "Sailor told me there was a bigger strike in another valley—" "How much is passage around the Horn?—" "Don't get one of those dinky little shovels—"*

Fred Stephens saw Vice-President Terman come pounding out of the bank, a wild look in his eye, a copy of the *Evening Post* under his arm. A man came up and read the dispatch over the clerk's shoulder, squinting in the deepening gloom.

They read of a Californian who had sauntered curiously into the gold fields, borrowed tools and returned home to arouse his clan with four hundred dollars to show for a week's careless work. Larkin estimated that ten thousand dollars a day had been taken from two rivers in a few days. He fired Stephens' blood by his casual remark that *"The emigrants from the Atlantic states we shall have in October and December will soon swell the value of California gold that will be washed out to an unheard-of value."*

Stephens and the man reading over his shoulder grew even more breathless at Larkin's opinion that the "Placer" would last almost half a century, as he described in detail the feverish downing of tools in every Californian pursuit in favor of mining. The last line of the letter was almost hysterical:

"In two weeks, Monterey will be nearly without inhabitants."

"Yes, but listen to this," the man behind Stephens said loudly. He read the reprint of the *Washington Union's* comment on the letter—

We have seen specimens of the California gold As far as we have seen it, it does not appear in large lumps, such as we found the other day in a gold mine in Virginia, worth $550. Indeed, the largest pieces said to have been found does not exceed an ounce.—The specimens we have seen were in minute pieces, much resembling the scales of a small fish.

"That doesn't make it so good, does it?" the man inquired, looking around.

There was no reply. Like so many other New Yorkers, Frederick Vincent Stephens had joined the Gold Rush.

★

COLORADO DAYS

Special Feature by Bess Ritter

COLORADO journalism was very "frank and earnest" back in the good old gold and silver mining days, according to these samples which were clipped from the *Miner,* which was published in Silvertown in the '70s:

If the demoralized cuss with the number 10 boots who stole the clothing off our wash line one night last week will apply at this office, and produce convincing proof that he is poorer than we are, he can take the rest of our household wardrobe gratis.

Some fellow under the influence of inebriety imagined last Sunday night that he had reached his bedchamber, when the fact was that he had only got into a small outhouse in the rear of the restaurant, used for certain purposes. Here he lodged all night, instead of being in the calaboose that our City Dads ought to provide.

Go to Chase and Sears if you want to buy tobacco and cigars. It's a filthy weed but if you must use it, you cannot do better than buy of them, for they always keep the best.

Notice—Frank S. Butler advertises that I have left his bed and board. This is a mistake as I own the bed and took it with me.

Not every Colorado community in the rip-roaring days that don't exist any more was interested in a life of law and disorder, as exemplified by the sheriff of a small city in the state: He put up a sign at either end of the road

that ran through it which read: OUR JAIL IS AS LARGE IF NOT AS NICE AS OUR HOTEL. MAKE YOUR CHOICE NOW AS TO WHERE YOU WANT TO STOP. Few strangers could fail to spot it. Another Colorado community adopted the same idea by posting the following at its city limits: OUR MARSHALL AND HIS DEPUTIES SHAVE EACH OTHER WITH THEIR SIX SHOOTFRS. STRANGER KEEP YOUR GUN HOLSTERED.

The state of Colorado had a great deal to do with today's familiar slogan, "See America First." It was coined by an American named Shadrack K. Hooper, who hired native German artists to invent Colorado scenery to illustrate the phrase.

This man, incidentally, was the No. 1 Barnum of mountain press men, and was responsible for a large portion of the Colorado railroad advertising that was put out from the 1870s until about 1910 for eastern consumption. These leaflets grossly exaggerated the terrifying aspects of the peaks, and showed trains that calmly mastered corkscrew precipices that couldn't possibly be scaled—but apparently were. The work was farmed out overseas, because the lithography and color work of Germany was far superior to anything that could be obtained in Colorado.

However, as a consequence, most of the hair-raising representations of the Colorado mountains were actually pictures of the Bavarian Alps, since they were executed by artists who had never seen Colorado. It is also amusing to note that when an eastern traveler did travel the narrow gauge roads of Colorado, he was given one of these terrifyingly illustrated pamphlets to hold in his lap by the train conductor. This forced his imagination to convince him that what he was examining from his window must somehow live up to the picture he was holding.

The Best in Fiction and Features

GENIUS LOCI ..... *Thomas N. Scortia*
Hardly anything in the New Glendale colony seemed to make sense to investigator Alfred Cadis, even though he'd been warned that he'd find it odd. Not only was it open season on bachelors here all the time, but there was a matter of a plant blight that affected human beings, and things freezing in temperatures much too high!

THE RETURN FROM TROY ..... *Russ Winterbotham*
Fernando Einhardt had a novel idea about his ward, Janna, at least novel in 100th Century. Whoever heard of a girl having two suitors to fight over her?

HIS HEAD IN THE CLOUDS (illustrated on cover) ....
Pete Willer didn't want to wait four more years before he could enter the Space Academy; he wanted to be a pilot now

Plus many other memorable stories and departments

The pocket-size September issue is now on sale

THE ORIGINAL
SCIENCE FICTION
STORIES

HEADLINE FOR BOOTHILL

Complete Novelet

by Elton Webster

Even if he had proof of Boss Logan's crimes, Larry knew that Anson Graves wouldn't win out by publishing the facts in his newspaper. He'd merely get himself and Jessis a ticket to Boothill!

IT SEEMED as if the rattling snarl of gunfire from the *Lucky Strike Bar* had barely ceased to reverberate down Red Lode's main street. And then in the ruddy twilight, four men came walking down the road with gray-mustached Carl Hasse's corpse stretched on the old door they carried like pall bearers. Hasse had suffered a fatal sudden attack of lead poisoning at the *Lucky Strike*. As was usual in so many shootings in Red Lode of late, the trigger slammers had vanished in thin air, unidentified by witnesses to the fracas as well. Larry Polk understood the reason for the onlookers being apparently blind, too. Fear—fear and an understandable desire to keep their skins in one piece, unperforated. Now, gazing out through the front window of the *Lode Ledger*, Polk watched with cold, impersonal eyes as they toted the body past.

"Another cargo for Boot Hill," he said nonchalantly.

Jessie Graves came around her father's paper-littered editorial desk angrily. Her small, tiny-waisted body drew itself up to his shoulder, vibrating with fury. The head of gleaming coal-black hair, drawn into two braids over her little shoulders, was tilted back, the even blacker eyes snapping.

"Lawrence G. Polk!" she cried, thrusting her fisted hands downward. One of them struck the big pair of shears balanced atop the pastepot on her father's desk. "Larry! A man's dead. *Another* man. *More* blood shed in Red Lode." She inhaled so hard the breath hissed in her tip-tilted nose. "And all you can do is stand there and

make cynical remarks! A broken-down middle-aged man, out of work and—"

POLK TURNED to her languidly, sandy head bent down as he towered over her. Thumbs at the end of his long arms hooked into his cartridge belt. "Look, missy, you don't know the tally. Now—"

"Don't call me 'missy', Larry Polk," she snapped with a stamp of her little foot. "I'm a grown-up woman. I can set type and correct copy. I've even written some of the stories in the paper and—"

"And you still don't know what it's all about, Jessie," Polk told her imperturbably. "A poor penniless man, this late Carl Hasse, eh? Only Hasse happened to have a rep down along the Border as a hired killer. And here, in the Lode, until a week ago, he was said to be on Boss Logan's payroll and—"

He broke off at the wild shouting out in the road. Hop Songler, the gold-rush town drunkard who held ragged body and soul together by occasional jobs as a swamper, was bouncing along the wooden sidewalk. Howling like a banshee, he kept jabbing a long emaciated arm at the bearded man holding up the left back corner of the door bearing the remains of Carl Hasse.

"He was one o' the killers! Him—the one with the beard!" Hop was mouthing, swaying a little in his customary inebriated state. He danced in his impotent rage, beard-stubbled hollow face working. "That's him—I saw him! He was one of 'em wh-what—what shot Carl from the side! Pore ol' Carl!" He began to blubber, shaking in his cracked runover boots.

"Carl—my friend, my friend! And there's one uh his dirty murderers! Can't ya see?" His voice rose to a wild screech.

Stranger things had happened in bloody Red Lode of late, Larry Polk knew. He cut his eyes to the bearded, accused jasper now helping to tote the body. The man walked, slightly bent, eyes straight ahead, bearded, broad face as w o o d e n as if he were deaf. Polk saw he was a stranger, part of the steady stream with its human flotsam and jetsam constantly flowing in and out of Red Lode, and Polk knew Hop was a drunkard. But he knew too the man was strictly honest, that he must have seen something. Even as Polk watched, Hop Songler's wrath seemed to sober him. He drew himself straight, still pointing accusingly as he moved along parallel to the dead one and the four. Hop passed the newspaper office window.

Then off to the right behind Hop. Larry Polk spotted Milo Fast crossing to that side of the street, swinging in on Hop's wake purposely. Fast's long bone-sharp jaw never broke the rhythm of its slow steady chomp on his t o b a c c o wad. He was a big tall man, red-faced, with rounded slouching shoulders. The light-hued eyes in his flat face looked as if they'd been painted there. Watchers parted to open a gap for him as he s t e p p e d across the weed-grown gutter to the sidewalk. Milo Fast was accustomed to having folks make way for him. He was Boss Logan's first lieutenant and a deadly hombre with the gun irons. Nobody had ever seen him miss, nobody had ever seen him betray emotion either.

HE CAME down past the *Ledger* office, walking faster, right hand held against his tied-down gun holster. His eyes were riveted on the back of the ranting Hop on ahead. He passed. And moving with a peculiar silent swiftness, Polk stepped around the girl, was out the door, and striding after Fast. Polk was tall but not nearly as big as Fast, devoid of a single ounce of extra flesh. His shoulders merely looked broad because his hips in the skin-tight blue jeans were so narrow and small. Under the flat-crowned black sombrero, he was lean-headed. There was a wide seam of mouth hardened as if by bitter acid by things that had happened to him in the last few months. And the very wide-open blue eyes were those of a man who has learned that hope is just an orey-eyed d r e a m, a lying mirage on the bleak trail of life. He walked fast without seeming to.

Hop Songler was still shrieking as he accompanied the progress of the dead man on the door toward the gold rush town's burial ground. Fast closed on him, somehow as inexorable and implacable as Fate itself. Behind Fast came L a r r y Polk, lengthening his stride to move up on Fast. Polk didn't watch the hand plastered over the gun scabbard; he knew Milo Fast had a trick, when in close, of doing his shooting with a double-barelled derringer he carried beneath his vest.

In front, Hop Songler stopped at the corner of a side alley. He grabbed a man he knew by the shoulder and started to protest to him, brandishing his other emaciated arm. The man sighted Milo Fast's approach. The man p u l l e d away from poor Hop and walked into the nearby barbershop hurriedly. Fast halted a yard away from the excited Hop. Hop glimpsed him over a thin shoulder; twisted his head to take a second glance. Then he got the look of a man peering down a gun barrel. His mouth clamped hard.

Fast said nothing; just gestured to his left down the alley with a move of his head. Hop shrivelled in his rags; then, like a slave trapped by invisible fetters, slumping, he obeyed, went down the alley. Fast shot a quick glance around, sneered at the town marshal's deputy across the street,

then disappeared after Hop Songler.

FIFTY FEET down in the dimness of the alley, he said, "Stop there, Hop." Fast pushed one of his tailor-made cigarets into his mouth. "Too danged bad you got such a loose jaw, Hop. Too..."

He never heard Polk's light footfall on the damp earth of the alley. Larry Polk strode by Fast as if he were a tree or a post. "Hop, you long-eared drunken galoot, where the devil is that five dollars you borrowed from me, huh?" Hop's birdlike face jerked around at the new voice.

Polk was on him, cursing a little. He shook the ragged town derelict, shoved him out into the middle of the alley; called him some more names. Grabbed him roughly by the arm when he tottered and buckled at the knees.

"You're a-going to git that dinero or I'll kick you from one end of the main drag to the other!" Polk warned as he steered him back to the head of the alley. They passed the silent Fast, now leaning against the corner of the cabin in the alley. Back on the main road, with the men bearing the corpse already outside of the town, Polk led Hop into the nearest whiskey mill.

They had a couple of drinks. "Don't do no more talking, Hop," Polk advised. It was hardly necessary. Hop Songler was like a caved-in sack now, trembling till the fresh red-eye steadied him. The fury born of brutal injustice had left him. He realized now, after his brief encounter with the deadly Milo Fast, how close to, perhaps, death...or, at the least, a vicious gun-whipping...he'd been. Now, he nodded weakly.

"Mebbeso you did see things, Hop. Forget about 'em, though. They's nothing you can do: sabe? Nothing. Have another snort." Polk tossed a fresh bill on the bar. Over his shoulder, through the front window, he could see Fast smoking as he leaned against a tree outside.

"It was murder—in cold blood," Hop murmured.

"What do you expect in a gold-rush town? Gold is always blood-stained. People are locoed for wealth. Reckon it's the same all over the world." Larry Polk was half talking to himself, lips bitter.

"Yes-s-, yes." Hop's head began to sag. "Yes. Uh..." Polk got him over to a chair behind a corner table. The scrawny man began to drowse, just nodded when Polk warned him to stay there till things cooled down. And to keep his lip pinned up. Then Larry Polk left.

"SMART JASPER, ain't you, Polk?" said Milo Fast, shifting away from the tree. The movement of his boots with the silver design in the toes lifted dust puffs that hung almost motionless on the sullen heat of the late afternoon. "Slicker'n slobbers, huh?"

Polk stopped with his face close to the red one of Boss Logan's lieutenant. There was that instinctive natural antipathy between the pair that is bred by the contact of harsh wire-tough hombres, both of whom can resort to violence when the circumstances warrant it. Polk smiled with a corner of his mouth.

"Fast, any time you don't like something I can do," Polk said softly, "you can grab yourself a fast horse—and go straight plumb to hell!"

Fast rubbed his sharp jaw, regarding Larry Polk as if he were a cow critter he was thinking of buying. "Polk, you ain't a bad feller. Naw... But you ain't got much sense. Naw... Now, some day, you're a-going to interfere once too many times in somebody's business. And—" He spread his hands, palms up, as if it would be beyond his control.

Polk unhurriedly plucked the smoking quirly from Fast's mouth and

flipped it into the road. "The smoke was getting in my eyes."

Milo Fast didn't move; and yet, somehow, he did. Did as if he were writhing inside, as if he were a snake coiling to strike. Larry Polk's smile widened.

"About interfering in somebody's business... Mebbe you mean Boss Logan's business— Mebbe you mean some day you'll get the sign to take care of Polk, eh? Yeah. Fast, when that day comes, come with your hand filled. And," he tapped Fast's chest with a long stiff finger, "if you shoot me first, it won't hurt me none at all. Because I don't care—about anything. Sabe?" Then he went on along the creaky wooden sidewalk.

Milo Fast called after him, "Hope you don't have to up and leave town soon, Polk..."

- 2 -

CARPENTERS' hammers were banging away at the new store being erected beside the blacksmith's barn as Larry Polk walked back to the *Ledger* office. Across the road, a patent medicine salesman was haranguing a handful of people from the tail-gate of his gaudily painted wagon. The womenfolk were jabbering away again on the steps of the big General Merchandise Store. Already, with the gunsmoke barely cleared away, Red Lode had almost forgotten its latest blood-letting. Polk sneered, walked faster through the boom town.

Even though he had been raised here, the town would always have an unfamiliar look to him now. He'd known it before the gold rush; known it when it was just a settlement called The Gulch. A place where the stage coaches paused but briefly on the run south to Norden City. That was before a man named Red—last name forgotten—had discovered that vein of gold back in the hills over the town. He'd come out with a poke full of it, headed for Norden City to file his claim with the Federal agent. Somewhere along the line he'd gotten himself a skinful of redeye and let his tongue wag. Inside of a few days, prospectors and adventurers and tinhorn gamblers and men with triggers to hire, were flocking to the place they described as Red's Lode, later to become known simply as Red Lode.

That was what had happened to the place once known as the Gulch at the head of the cut spearing back into the foothills. That was why he would always feel like a stranger in it. He went by the *Ledger* office, on the other side of the street, strode past the new buildings still redolent of green wood. Past the tents hastily thrust up as places of business. Down a side road, passing the tumble-down shacks and cabins, the old house where a circuit-riding dentist had set up his temporary office. He made another turn, face dark in bitter meditation. He wondered why he'd done it, why he'd gone to the trouble to save Hop Songler.

IT ONLY meant trouble, inevitably. Backed by Boss Logan, who just about owned the town, lock, stock and barrel, Milo Fast never forgave men who got in his way. He had a trick of settling with them at some convenient moment. Sometimes such ones were found dead; other times they were picked up out in the brush, beaten unconscious, battered to the point of unrecognizability. And never could it be proven that Fast had had a hand in it. Those who lived refused to talk, usually skulked out of Lode afterward, never to return. Polk, making a turn up a lane, knew there would come a day of reckoning.

"You fool!" he cursed himself. Shrugged. "What does that redeye-swigging Songler mean to you?" There was no answer. He had, he knew, simply acted instinctively; and that was

a thing he should have learned to conquer by now. He cursed again, then found himself back on the main drag, his feet taking him toward the *Ledger* office. And he wondered why.

Jessie took an eager step toward him when he entered. Asked if Hop was all r i g h t. Her face lighted when he nodded and she started to speak. He cut off her compliments brusquely, saying:

"You were feeling sorry for the late Mr. Hasse, when I left. He was one of the Boss' gunslingers. Apparently he broke with Boss Logan. Then—" Polk shrugged. "Well, mebbe-so he knew too much; mebbe the Boss didn't trust him. What does it matter?" He was building a tube of Durham languidly. "He lived by the gun; he died by the gun. What else had he a right to expect?"

Jessie's hands clenched at her sides, the left one beating against the ink-smudged printer's apron she wore. "I don't care what Carl Hasse did...or was, Larry Polk," she hurled at him. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself! He was a human critter. Yet you can sneer after he was shot down like a cur-dog! He wasn't the first one; and he won't be the last to die that way."

"No, not the last," Polk agreed.

"And yet you can stand there like that!" She stomped one of her small feet in fury. "We here, on the paper, are trying to fight this wave of lawlessness. We're bucking Boss Logan himself. And..."

He shot streamers of smoke from his nostrils, nodding. "I know... It's dangerous, what you're doing." He stepped over to her father's desk and jabbed a finger at the headline of last week's edition of *The Ledger*. It read: *"Two More Miners Mysteriously Killed!"* And beneath it the subhead declared, "Boss Logan Acquires Six More Claims. Law Must Be Brought to Red Lode." "That's dangerous," he said again. "Logan ain't a-going to like it none at all."

Her mouth tightened. "He's already warned us...indirectly."

Polk shook his head. "You're just bucking Fate, missy. Can't you see that? Where there's gold, there's bound to be blood. Why should your father risk his own skin—as well as yours—by trying—"

THE FRONT door of the office scraped as it was opened. Anson, Graves, editor of the *Ledger*, Jessie's father, came in, feet dragging heavily. He was a little balding stoop-shouldered man in a shiny black frock coat and a stovepipe hat; but now he seemed smaller than ever, shrunken inside his clothes. His face was haggard, mouth pulled down at the corners as if by invisible hooks. And the eyes behind the spectacles, usually snapping fire with their defiant brightness, were dull mirrors of discouragement now. He nodded silently to the pair, slapped his hat down on the desk with a sigh.

Jessie went to him quickly. "What's the matter, Dad?"

He s h o o k his head, ran a yellow-skinned hand through the remaining wisps of his gray hair. "Hasse...Hasse ...he's dead—gone now. And he was my last hope. While he was alive, I had something over Boss Logan. Now..." He shook his head.

"I didn't know you were working with Hasse," she said.

Anson Graves looked past her to Larry Polk. "I didn't myself—at first." His voice reflected the strain under which he was laboring. There had been a go-between at first, he told wearily, voice dry with discouragement. A gent who said he could provide proof of certain crimes committed by Boss Logan or indirectly by him through Milo Fast and the hired trigger slammers. The gent said the man he represented didn't want dinero. His motive had apparently been revenge on the Boss. What he did demand was a guarantee that he would be protect-

ed, that he, the source of the exposure, would not be revealed.

Graves stroked his high forehead. "I knew I was taking a risk; but I thought if I could print charges in the paper and turn the proof over to the governor— Well—" He shook his head. There had been negotiations. Carl Hasse had been revealed as the hombre ready to double cross Boss Logan. He promised to put his testimony in a sworn written statement.

"I was to have it yesterday. Then Hasse got a little scared, it seemed. Sent me word that he'd made the statement; that he'd named names who would corroborate what he said. And the go-between told me Hasse would get it to me today after he'd had a chance to slip out of town down to Norden City. Now—well, Hasse won't be going anywhere."

He thumped the desk weakly with small work-cracked hands. "Part of his evidence concerned the death of Chuck Renner." He referred to a miner who'd struck a lode, then been found dead in the charred ruins of his cabin in Little Coyote Valley up back of the town.

"You wouldn't tell me who you were working with, Mr. Graves, but I suspected it was Hasse," said the soft-voiced Sid Polk, Larry's cousin. He'd moved in his gentle, silent way through the doorway at the rear of the office to the press room. Larry's cousin was a smaller man, with a beautiful saintlike face below thick curly black hair. He always stood slightly stooped as if he'd detract attention from his slight hunchback. But despite his gentle demeanor, the affliction that barred him from a life of action, the fervor of his big luminous eyes bespoke the banked fires inside him. He stood wiping his inky hands on his apron; Sidney Polk worked as a printer for Old Man Graves.

"I figured it was Hasse," he said again.

GRAVES nodded. Then a dry sob came from Jessie. Her interlaced hands worked before her. Larry saw the enraptured light that leaped into his cousin Sid's when he turned them on the girl. Then Sid moved over and gently touched her shoulder as if she were a fragile piece of china.

"Why don't we give up?" she cried in a fierce little voice. "Why don't we sell out and go somewhere that isn't a spawning hole for vice and violence and bloodshed?" She brushed at a tear trailing down her cheek. "Oh, Dad, we can't win here—ever! Boss Logan is too much for us. It—oh, it's his power and hired guns against your printer's ink and the headlines you write. And it's too much."

Graves shook his head. "I lost my big hope—my big chance. But no, I won't give up; I'd be a coward to run. I won't!"

"That's right, Mr. Anson," said Sid with unexpected steel in his soft musical voice. "I'll stick with you."

Larry said nothing as he slowly pinched out his quirly. He felt Sid's eyes on him, then those of the girl. There was something of pleading, something of scorn in their looks.

He drew on his sombrero. "Got to drift along to see a man." He went out into the gathering dusk of the street. He knew they resented him because he was doing nothing in the cause, toward the attempt to clean up the gold camp. He shrugged cynically. They ought to know better, he told himself. It was the nature of men that made such places as Red Lode exist.

"Every man or woman has his price," he murmured. Then he pulled down his sombrero purposefully. He had an errand of his own to handle now. He didn't intend to wait around to be shot down like a fish in a barrel by Milo Fast. Polk was going to the Boss, put his cards on the table, and ask him how he wanted it, peace or war. . .

- 3 -

GOING along the main line, he kept to the outside of the sidewalk. Kept, too, an eye peeled on dim alleys, the doorways of bars where drygulchers might lurk. There was nowhere in Red Lode where an hombre was safe against being burnt down by Logan-hired guns once the order had been given. Young fillies and hussies from the honky tonks alike cut an eye at the lean man with the dark look who had a certain dynamic fascination about him; but he passed along, ignoring them. He calmly armed his way through three orey-eyed brawling miners, sent two of them stumbling back on their heavy boots. They threw curses after him. He seemed not to hear.

He was thinking, *I'm not afraid to die. I don't care much one way or the other. But I hate the idea of Fast making buzzard meat outa me without slapping a slug back...* It was no idle piece of braggadocio, that about not fearing death. Indolent, bleak-eyed Larry Polk had nothing in life to interest him any more. Not since Norden City. Norden and Ida Wilson, daughter of the sheriff down there.

It had been several years ago that he'd left Red Lode, determined, ambitious. That was just after his father, a penniless storekeeper, had died in debt. Before, too, that the place had become a gold rush town. And he had been determined to be big, to be a power, not to go along struggling bitterly against poverty like his dad. And there had been nothing in the town then for a young man.

In Norden, he'd found work, finally been taken on the sheriff's staff. Became known as a deputy who, even in crooked Norden, couldn't be bought. Fearless and slick with a gun, he'd built himself up to Wilson's chief deputy. He'd saved, made some small investments on the side, been about ready to get himself his first cow outfit. There were strong well-to-do men in Norden who'd back him because of his fine reputation. And there had been the flaxen-haired Ida, Wilson's daughter. She and Larry had been as good as pledged; it was understood between them.

And then that lobo had escaped from the State prison, come back and put a slug in the spine of the man who'd sent him there. Meaning, Sheriff Wilson. Wilson didn't die; but the wound was to cripple him for life. Larry had kissed Ida goodbye, taken the trail. Stuck to it long after the posse had given up. It had been months later up in the Mogollones that he'd given the lobo a catching, smashed his leg with a bullet, and brought him back to Norden City. He was greeted by Ida as a bride; she'd married the wealthy owner of the town's hotel and big dancehall, a paunchy middle-aged man, while he'd been gone. The paunchy man had cleared a new fortune in speculation on land along the right-of-way of the railroad spur.

Larry had quitted Norden forever, gone on a tear, then ended up in Red Lode trying to find something that life still held for him. There didn't seem to be anything. Nothing could rouse his interest. He spat into the gutter weeds, sneered at the badge of one of the passing deputies of the town marshal, laughed inside coldly at himself. Yeah, he knew about people; and knowing had made life empty to him.

BUT NOW he had to settle with Boss Logan. He stopped at the corner across the street from *The Lode*. It was Logan's big gambling hall, actually the headquarters of the town. Polk hitched at his gun belt, fingered the butt, then crossed the road in the last reflected glow of the set sun. A bitter little smile curled one

corner of his mouth when he went in the big double doors.

The buzz of talk; the click of poker chips; the stale odor of layers of blue tobacco smoke; and the aroma of cheap forty-rod whiskey. All hit him as he moved inside, passing the two house guards at the front. One of them moved an arm slightly in signal. Larry Polk saw another down by the back end of the bar stir, pick him out, then lounge over against a pole whence he could watch him. Polk sashayed along the bar, nodding to a couple of acquaintances. He felt like a man treading on the lip of hell with a cocked gun in his back. He wished he had been able to single out Fast.

He stepped up to a gap at the middle of the counter, threw down a silver dollar and called for some gila juice. His eyes raked the place in the back bar mirror. The front room with the bar was a big rectangle, barnlike and high-ceilinged. Off it at the rear a narrower shedlike structure stretched, the part of the establishment where the gambling tables were.

The crowd parted slightly. There was a rift in the pall of smoke. And in the mirror reflection, Polk saw Boss Logan himself. He was at a table back in the ell corner formed by the narrowing of the building, behind the other tables. At the same instant, Larry detected a stout house-guard named Cantro and Fast himself converging on him from two different directions. Cantro was the closer. Polk stood with his glass half lifted as if about to drink till Cantro was almost to his right elbow; then he smacked down the drink, wheeled swiftly, and grabbed Cantro by the wrist of his gun hand.

"Take me to the Boss—pronto," he said quietly but with a knife edge in his voice. Cantro, surprised, started to point and say Logan was right over there. "*Take* me to him!" whipped again; and, holding Cantro's arm as if they were friends, he marched him across the floor through the throng.

LOGAN SAT before a bottle with some friends. He was a stout man but with the real fat in his face. Great jowls sagged at either side of it. Together with the sad red-cornered eyes, they gave him a hound-dog's lugubrious look. He looked up at Larry Polk's approach, tugging at the red neckerchief hanging inside the coat of his iron-black suit. Boss Logan smiled, raised a beringed hand. But his shrewd lips thinned wisely, snakily.

"Howdy, Polk."

"Want some words with you, Boss."

"Sure, Polk. Put your pants in a chair and help yourself to a drink. Just talking with a Law and Order Committee," he indicated the three rough grim-jawed men at the table, "who believe them danged lies that I'm behind all this trouble and killing." He shook his head sadly. "Now, me—"

"Want private talk, Boss," Larry cut in. "And now—it's important."

Boss Logan's heavy eyebrows climbed. Then he gestured to the trio of the committee, said he'd discuss things with them later. They rose and moved away. There was just Polk, facing the Boss who sat with his back to the side wall. And Cantro a little behind Larry, with smudge-eyed Fast lounging against the back wall of the ell. Off from Logan's right a dark stairs led to living quarters above. Polk said, "Had a little trouble with one of your men today."

The Boss picked a cold cigar stub from the table edge, pushed back his black hat, regarded the cigar, then said. "Naw! You didn't have no trouble really, did you, Larry? Naw." His eyes cut to Milo Fast.

Polk was trying to watch every move around him even as he stood slouching, apparently completely relaxed. The shadows part way up the stairs seemed thicker. "I'm not just batting my tongue, Boss. What I came

to find out is how you want it, war from now—or just us all going along peaceable."

Logan said, "Now, Larry, you must uh got things all wrong. I *never* want trouble. Me, I—" He waved the ring-spangled hand.

"Listen, Boss, I don't care—which way it is. I'm not afraid of you and all the holsters you own. Sabe? I'm—not—afraid. But I'll take two-three of your men along to hell afore they cut me down. Sabe?"

Logan looked pained. "Larry, you're so hot-headed. I got enough folks hate—well, disliking my boys now. You'd think I was an outlaw or something." He sighed ponderously. "A place like this, you got to have protection. A heap of rough characters in Lode. Now why don't you sit down and have a drink and we'll—"

LARRY POLK'S darting nervous eyes caught the dull glint of metal from partway up the dark stairs. He saw a man's boot with its spur; then the gun spiking out of the gloom a little above the boot. The gun muzzle bore on the side of Boss Logan's head. Polk reacted instinctively, reacted as he had sworn never to do again. Never to aid another human being. But habit was strong; he couldn't let even a man of Boss Logan's like be dry-gulched. With blazing speed, his right hand shifted. Then he had the .45 plucked from the scabbard on his hip, sweeping up, cocking.

There was three interblended roaring reports. Polk's first snapshot missed. His second slug went home jut as the faceless figure on the stairs let go with his shot. Boss Logan jumped up, staring at the bullet gash on the table before him. And the little man on the stairs, wounded in the side, came stumbling down it as he cursed.

Fast and Cantro were on him in a split second, Fast stunning him with a gun barrel blow over the side of the head. He was a bird-faced gunslinger called Nevada Paige, a man who lived here in Lode by hiring himself to protect the claims of miners. Evidently this time somebody had offered him dinero to get Logan himself.

The patrons of the big place started to swirl toward the scene. But the Boss' well-trained crew had things under control quickly. They formed a half ring before the corner. Logan himself ordered Paige turned over to the town marshal, asserting, "I'm a lawful citizen." Then he ordered drinks on the house. Two of his men, half holding up the would-be killer, led him out. Soon things were back to practically normal. Attempts on a man's life were common enough occurences in Red Lode.

Then the Boss turned those sad eyes, now glassy with anger, on Milo Fast. "Well, where the hell were you then, Fast? How did he get in that back way? Your men are supposed to be watching every door all the time." Without raising his voice he proceeded to rawhide Fast savagely. He ended by branding him the son of a mongrel dog, almost spitting in Fast's white face. "You snaky lunkhead, you're too worried about a-gitting revenge for some personal offense." He cut his eyes to Polk when he said that.

Then he poured a couple of drinks, one for himself and one for Larry. Lifted his glass. "If anybody so much as cocks a trigger on you in this town, Polk, they answer to me, the Boss. And that means—*everybody!*" He slid his eyes to Milo Fast...

- 4 -

WHEN HE left, men stared at him, some venomously. Word had already gotten around how he'd saved Boss Logan's life. He went down to a Chinese's eating place on a side street and got some grub, thinking hard as he ate. Tried

to figure it. Lord knew he had no love for the Boss. Yet he couldn't have watched an assassin spring from the dark to strike and have held his hand.

Finished, he went into one of the smaller bars and stood alone and drank, trying to find the answer. Trying to understand why he felt dirty-handed, almost loathesome to himself. Then it came to him, slowly. It was because he was so reluctant to return to *The Ledger* office and face them. And he made it a habit to pick up his cousin, Sid, at the office evenings and walk him home since the time Sid had been dragged into an alley and slugged. Jessie and her father lived in a couple of rooms over the office. Jessie and her father—he could picture their looks now when he faced them after saving the Boss...

He had a fresh slug of redeye, trying to think of excuses for himself. There was no real evidence against Boss Logan. No witnesses; those out in Boot Hill didn't count any more. But there were stories, accusations, allegations. They said that if the Boss didn't get a man's gold one way, he got it another. First off he had the gambling hall and more than one cap had been busted on a man there over a charge of crooked dealing. Then they said that the Boss owned half the claims around The Lode, holding them under the names of dummies, of men on his payroll secretly. Claims, too, were won by the house over the green baize tables of the gambling hall.

And then there was the violence, the bloodshed, prospectors being run off strikes and their claims jumped. Men shot down in the streets by mysterious unidentified gunmen. Others killed in strange accidents on their claims. Gents just up and hitting the trail, quitting their claims after being subjected to brutal beatings. The word was that the Boss owned the very soul of the Federal agent at the Claims Filing office. In cases after deaths or disappearances, bills of sale would appear to show that the late owner had recently sold out to the Boss. Or that one of Logan's men had been a silent partner of the recent owner. The point was that the Boss was acquiring most of the good claims and strikes. And Red Lode lived in an atmosphere of terror.

"Why won't they realize that men like Boss Logan will always exist?" he said half aloud thinking of Anson Graves and the fight of his *Ledger* to combat the Boss and bring Law and order to the gold-boom town. A heap of gents would be "Bosses" if they packed the nerve. Old Graves was just butting his head against a stone wall.

LARRY POLK quickened his stride as he turned into the main line near *The Ledger* office. At least he had settled his personal problem. Milo Fast wouldn't dare to try to drygulch him now. He stepped into the yellow rectangle of glow before the newspaper office, even summoned a whistle tune as he pushed open the door.

Jessie looked up from work at her father's desk. Polk noted then how she looked like a schoolgirl seated behind the teacher's desk. Her eyes flashed angrily back at his grin. She said in almost a whisper: "So you've gone on Boss Logan's payroll, now."

He felt as if he'd been quirted across the face. "I didn't know you believed in murder, ma'm! And it would have been murder if I'd kept my hogleg penned. Nobody else saw the killer."

She was on her feet, nostrils flaring like an excited pony's. "But you haven't raised a hand to stop any of his murders, you...you hero!" she flamed. "You always said every man had his price, Larry Polk. Well, now I know yours. You..."

"Jessie, please!" Anson Graves had appeared from the press room. The girl started to stamp a foot.

Then Larry was around the desk,

had her by the shoulders, shaking her. "You stop that, you stop that!" he cried in a cold fury. Then he put her back down on her feet. "Where is Sid? Isn't he ready to leave?"

Graves answered eager to change the tide of the conversation. "He left earlier, Larry."

"I told him not to go home alone after what happened."

"He didn't go home," Graves said. "I tried to stop him—honestly, I did, Larry." He was a little breathless with excitement, his voice tight with strain. "A man just threw it in the door, then hit the saddle. By the time I'd read it and run out into the road, he was riding out of town as if his life depended on it." He had a hunch it was the go-between who'd worked between him and the late Carl Hasse.

Polk had regained a semblance of calm though he kept his eyes off the girl. He hated himself, suddenly, for having handled her so roughly. It seemed incredible now that he'd even spoken so harshly to her. "The message? How would that effect Sid?"

"Hasse had made out those sworn statements before he was killed today," Graves explained. "And Logan didn't get them. Hasse had already hidden them. That was what the message said."

Polk put a match to his quirly, still not daring to meet the girl's eyes. "Yes? Well, if it's hidden—"

"The message told where they were hidden Out at Chuck Renner's burnt out cabin in Little Coyote Valley where his gold claim was. Buried in the shed, still standing, behind the cabin." Anson Graves' eyes gleamed with a new hope.

He was the type who was forever clutching at another straw, Polk figured. "All right. Suppose you get the statement. Once you publish the charges, do you think Boss Logan will stop at anything to get the proof you hold?"

It seemed like pretty much of a polecat trick, this scheme to capture the Diamond Gang Fay Diamond worshipped her lobo brothers even though she'd broken with them, she knew where the hideout was So Clyde Morgan would go to Fay, pretend he was an outlaw, and that the gang was in danger, then let her take him to the hideout. It seemed like a real mean thing to do to a gal . . .

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These people, they plumb had no sense.

Old Graves' eyes narrowed shrewd and he smiled. "I've been in touch with the governor's office. There is a special officer from there in town here right now. Incognito. I turn them over to him and he rushes them down to a superior in Norden City."

Larry Polk nodded through tobacco smoke. "Might work... But where did Sid go, anyway?"

THEY BOTH regarded him as if he were a chunkhead. "Why out to Little Coyote Valley to get them, of course," Old Graves said. "I tried to stop him but—"

"You fools!" Larry burst, the anger boiling in him. He'd always been as deeply attached to his cousin as if he were a brother, admiring his indomitable courage despite his affliction. "You fools! Letting him—"

"We couldn't stop him," Jessie threw back at him. "At least, Sid has nerve! *He* doesn't knuckle down to—"

Polk was out the door almost before he knew it. His boots hit the wooden sidewalk hard. But even about the rattle of them he could still hear the taunting flavor of Jessie Graves' last words. He cut into a side street, then down a lane. Then he was at the little cabin on the outskirts of the town that he shared with his cousin—in the shed behind, saddling up his pinto horse. He rode out northward over the sage-dotted flats to turn west and push up into the low broken hills above the canyon. There was a wheel-rutted trail where the prospectors hauled in supplies.

He tried to tell himself he was being a fool, but he was afraid for Sid. The poor devil didn't know how to handle a gun. He was weak for even a ride like this. And if Boss Logan had killed Hasse because he'd learned Hasse meant to sell him out, it was a good bet the wily Boss would know where he had hidden any evidence. In that case though, the Boss' men would already have gotten at it. Larry Polk eased a little in the kak but he still drove the knobby-legged pinto on hard into the hills.

Polk remembered when Chuck Renner's body had been brought down from the burnt cabin. Nobody understood how it had happened. There had been talk for some time that the close-mouthed Chuck, owner of the claim had hit it rich. His brother had helped him work it, and Henry used to get liquored up a whit and complain about how Chuck didn't trust banks. Henry hadn't been seen since the body had been brought to town. The Logan mob claimed he'd stolen Chuck's poke, killed him, and lit out. Nobody knew. Now, swaying to the motion of his pony under the rising silver of yellow moon, Polk recalled that earlier that day, when Anson Graves had told of working with the late Carl Hasse, knew where Henry Renner was Might even be in touch with him. And that seemed logical now, considering the fact Hasse had hidden the statement at the cabin site.

"Even if the statement is missing now," Polk mused half aloud beneath the creak of saddle leather and the clop of his pony's hoofs, "if Graves could reach Henry Renner, Graves would still have a chance to expose—" He broke off. He knew why the thought had come to him, him who up till now had refused to take a hand in *The Ledger's* fight. It was that thing he had just discovered this night about his feelings toward Jessie...

HE CAME to Coffee Creek, a silver strand in the moonlight, where the trees thinned, he spotted pony tracks, a heap of them going along the trail to the gap into Little Coyote Valley. He dropped off to inspect the horse sign. It was fresh. After that, he pushed harder.

He went through the little bottleneck into Little Coyote Valley, follow-

ing the creek course. And it was smack dab into trouble; he saw it at once. Riders had arrived just ahead of him, Boss Logan's men, he guessed at once. Watching anybody connected with *The Ledger*, they must have trailed Sid out of town. Slipping from the kak, Larry Polk watched the shadowy figures ahead. They were working along the creek, approaching warily the shell of the late Chuck Renner's cabin.

Polk thought fast. Sid must be already in there, back at the shed under the pines. Polk acted. Leading his pony, he began to run along the right side of the tiny valley, keeping in amongst the fringe of trees that grew down the side. The gurgle of the creek covered the sound of his movements. He got along to where he was almost behind the ruins of the cabin on the creek. Then one of the handful of Logan men yelled:

"There he is—in there—in the shed!" And Milo Fast's barked command came next. "Come on out, Polk! Come out or we'll fire and—"

Sid's gun answered from the shadows of the horseshed, pocking the night twice with its ruddy muzzle flame. Larry saw Fast's mounted men fan out as they began to close on the shed. Leaving his pony ground anchored amongst the trees, he cut down toward the shed, gun out. He saw one of the horsemen driving in for the side of the shed, paused, threw down on him. His Colts spat. The man rocked in the saddle with a howl, then was reining back the other way.

It stopped the attack. Fast and his men pulled back, swung toward the creek again. Larry ran down to the side of the shed that was b a t h e d in shadow by the trees.

"Sid! Sid!" he called. "It's me, Larry!"

"Larry? How'd you git here?" Larry slid around and into the front side of the shed. Sid was hunched inside

[*Turn To Page 82*]

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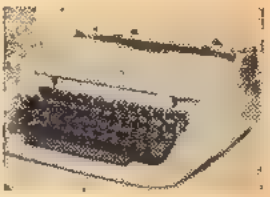

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When Larry asked him if he'd gotten the buried statement Sid pointed to the papers stuck inside his belt.

"Got 'em," he whispered. "But Gawd alone knows how I'll ever get out alive with them."

LARRY POLK sighted down at the creek and knew he was going to be a fool, that he was going to break the rule of human conduct he had set up for himself. He asked Sid where his pony was. Sid said it was up amongst the trees on the side of the valley.

"Then you can get out," Larry told him, watching the shadowy figures down by the creek. "Get going... I'll hold these gents." Sid started to protest. "Shut up," Larry told him. "Git out while you can. If you don't, the *Ledger* is whipped. Jessie and her father are finished. You can sabe that, can't you?" Larry's voice was brutal in its brusqueness.

Sid clasped his hand quickly. "I—I never suspected you felt these things, Larry."

"Git going... And lead your horse outa the valley. Don't ride him. Go."

Sid moved around the edge of the shed and into the tree-shadowed darkness. A twig cracked once, then he was gone. Larry saw them deploying down by the creek, knew they were going to come in again. But this time it would be a creeping attack. A gun punched muzzle flame toward the shed from off to Larry's right. The slug ripped through the back of the shed over the crouched man, but Larry held his fire, knowing they were trying to get him to show his position. He waited. Then he saw the head and shoulder of one of them behind a hum-

[*Turn To Page* 84]

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mock of brush. Larry fired twice, was rewarded by a yelp of pain. The man dropped down behind the piece of brush and did not reappear.

Then a bullet nicked him in the flesh of the left shoulder, spinning him half around. He held onto his Colts, straightened to see two figures cutting in from his left. He moved forward a step, took deliberate aim, hit the trigger again. One of the pair went over backward as if he'd run into an invisible wall, didn't rise. The other ducked, then went skulking off. Larry waited, trying to fight off the welling tension inside him. There were no more shots then. But he knew it wasn't over, that they'd get him eventually.

"You danged fool," he called himself softly. He thumbed fresh cartridges from his shell belt, reloaded the smoking weapon. His eyes strained as they scoured the night, wheeling, swivelling. It became very still save for the burble of the creek and the sound of the night insects. A cold feeling began to mount inside him. It was a losing game, like trying to buck one of Boss Logan's stacked decks. Come the first dawn light, when they could see him framed in that shed and they would pick him off for sure.

HE THOUGHT of getting out, but realized they would have him outflanked already; once he ventured out through those open moonlighted patches, they'd cut him down like a wolf. So he waited and watched with a hawkish intensity. It was nerve-wracking. He knew they were coming sometime. The very stillness itself became an enemy, a mute threat. Once there was the faint rattle of a spur, and he had a glimpse of a sombrero silhouetted for a moment down by the creek. He caught himself on the verge of praying that they would come and get it over with.

Then, it seemed like an eternity

[*Turn To Page* 86]

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So I thought I was familiar with all the latest, most efficient and improved adding machines now on the market.

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This feather-light precision adding machine was put to a test by a girl who had operated it for the first time just a few hours. And she lined up against a male expert working with pencil and paper. And against our machine operated with a $1.50 hand operated machine and with the most modern $200 electric!

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To The Man With

HERNIA

Who Can Not Submit To Surgery

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later, somebody was coming toward the shed, coming furtively through the darkness from up the valley, from Larry Polk's right. Larry peered out around the edge of the little shed. None of Fast's bunch were in sight. The man, Larry figured, was working through the trees at the edge of the little valley. Then he got a split-second look at him as the newcomer skulked across an open patch under the moon. It was the lanky fencepost-thin Henry Renner, brother of the late Chuck Renner who'd had this claim. He moved closer like a furtive animal, a drawn gun gleaming in his hand.

It was plain he was headed for the shed. Larry tried to figure what way to play it. He could use help and Renner might turn out to be an ally.

But Renner never made it. He was back in the tree shadows out of Larry's sight. Larry heard him cry out. "Who's that? Who's there?" Then there was the whiplash of a gun report. Renner yelped. The crouched Larry saw him reel out into the moonlight, gun gone, gripping his wounded right arm. And Milo Fast's men came closing in.

"Trying to escape, eh, Renner? Never knew it was you in the shed there!" Fast himself yelled. "Stand in your tracks, now!"

They clustered around him, believing he had been moving away from the shed instead of toward it. Fast screamed at him, demanding to know why he was at the shed, what he wanted there.

"Nothing, nothing," the wounded man said sullenly.

Fast struck him in the mouth, cursing him, repeated his query. Renner just shook his head. Fast hit him again; so did a couple of his men. Renner went down. One gent put a boot to him savagely. Renner screamed.

"Drag him up!" Fast ordered.

Larry realized it was his chance, a

[*Turn To Page* 88]

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thin one, to slip out. Because they were afraid of something they knew not what, they were so intent on making Renner open his jaw they'd momentarily forgotten Sid was supposed to be in the shed. Larry slipped around the front end at the other side, away from them. Glided off into the trees. He heard Henry Renner scream again as they worked on him to loosen up his tongue.

He got down to where he'd left his cayuse ground anchored. Led it out of the bottle neck of the little valley and then mounted. As he threw spur steel to the animal he heard the wild shouting behind. They'd discovered the shed was empty. Larry headed for Red Lode...

- 5 -

HE COULD hear the thunder of their pony hoofs on the back trail as he reached the end of the town. Leaving his animal at the cabin, he moved down to the main street. Riding in, he had figured why Renner had come down the valley to the shed. Being in on the deal, as Anson Graves had hinted, he'd known of the presence of the incriminating statements buried at the shed. Renner, as Larry Polk saw it, probably had aimed to get them and then sell them to the highest bidder. He'd always been noted for his avarice.

Larry turned onto the main drag, deserted at this hour. The honky tonks and whiskey mills had shut up, but down before *The Ledger* office a bright glow fell on the street from the front windows. And Larry could hear the clatter of the hand press. They were at work, printing an extra edition with copies of the sworn statements and evidence by Bass Logan's own henchmen. Larry swore softly. They'd never get away with it. To save his own skin, the Boss would have to take

[*Turn To Page* 90]

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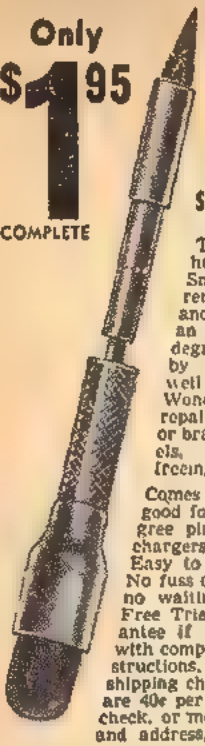

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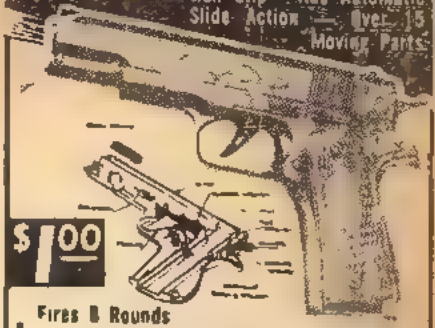

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steps. "The poor fools," Larry said to himself.

Because he knew that out in Little Coyote Valley, Fast and his men would have found out why he had come there, would have found out about the hidden incriminating document. They would know now what Graves and his paper held over Boss Logan's head. And they would come.

He entered the newspaper's little office. Jessie rushed out from behind her father's desk to greet him, arms outflung. "Larry, it was wonderful, wonderful!" she cried. "You risked your life out there to let Sid get back with the papers. I—I was afraid I'd never see you again." Her voice caught in her throat.

Larry admitted it to himself then. He had vowed never to let himself love another woman after what had happened in Norden City. But he knew now that he had adored Jessie. He took her hands, drew her toward him. And Graves stepped out of the press room beaming. He was in shirt sleeves, with his hands and forearms smeared with printers ink. But his eyes glowed with triumph.

"We've done it, Larry! We've got the deadwood on Logan." He held out a copy of the special edition fresh off the press. It was a one page paper like a large handbill, the type still glistening damply. "Look, Larry!"

Polk took it. The headline blazed

[*Turn To Page 92*]

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across the sheet, *"How Boss Logan Has Looted Red Lode."* There was a short indictment, then a facsimile of the sworn confession of the Boss' former henchman, his hired killer. And it was hanging stuff. It told how the Boss had sent him and several others out to Chuck Renner's cabin. How they had knocked him unconscious in the cabin, then set fire to it over his body. After that there were accounts of other crimes ordered by the Boss. Of how they'd killed Abel Stacy out on his claim. Of the time they ran Sam Wester out of the country forcing him to abandon his claim after two brutal beatings and the threat of a third one. It ran on, a lost of sickening brutal crimes, of blackmail by force, of shootings, of crookedness, of forcing men to sell out their claims at gun point.

Old Graves smiled wearily. "It'll break the Boss."

PALING a little, Larry Polk stared angrily. He was thinking of what might happen to Jessie when the Boss' men struck and the fight started. "Couldn't you have just sent this to the special State officer down at Norden?"

Graves bobbed his head. The original copy had already been dispatched to Norden City by a trusted rider. Now they were printing the story. It had to be that way, he said. The dead man's statement in itself would never convict the Boss in a court. You can't cross examine a statement. The statement would be passed on to the govenor's office. That plus *The Ledger's* expose would bring on an investigation.

"Don't you see, Larry? When Logan's hired trigger slammers realize we have the deadwood hung on them, they'll lose their nerve! Yes. Like rats on a sinking ship. They'll know the game is up. Don't you see?" old Graves insisted. "Then when the Special State officers come in and round

[*Turn To Page 94*]

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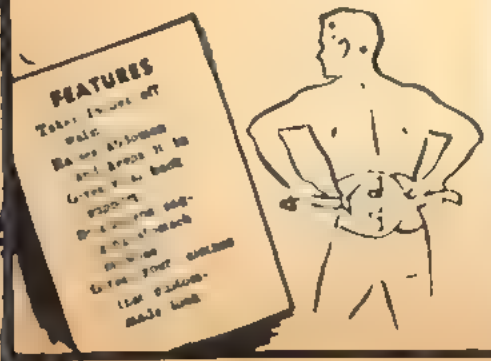

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them up for questioning, they'll talk—talk against the Boss—to save their own hides. That's why I've got to publish this statement."

Polk shook his head though he did understand the strategy. "Don't *you* see, Graves? The Boss is still using guns. Guns—against print! Don't you see?" He told about what had happened out in the valley. How Henry Renner had come and been picked up Milo Fast and his gunslingers. "The Boss will learn what you're trying to do. And he isn't going to take it!"

Graves shook his head stubbornly. "If he tries to hurt me now—once I have these handbills on the street—he'll convict himself! I'm going ahead, Larry." Sid called from back in the pressroom and Graves went back into it.

Larry looked at Jessie. She didn't seem to understand the danger either. There was the clatter of the press. Larry made his decision quickly. He was in this now. And he knew Milo Fast and his men would come before that indictment of the boss got out into circulation. Larry peeled off his coat, ignoring her when she asked what he meant to do.

"Get me one of those printer's aprons—pronto," he threw the order at her. She got it. He tied it on over his gunbelt. Then he stepped back into the pressroom. Sid hurried over to grip his hand, leaving the press for a moment. But Larry cut his thanks short.

"If anything happens, leave everything to me," he told Graves. "Just act as if I weren't here. They don't know that I am." Fast, after all, still didn't know Larry had been involved in the thing out at the valley. "Sabe?"

Graves nodded, seemingly to realize at last the danger that threatened. He and Sid went back to the job of getting out the special edition. Larry sat down on a box inside the press room, out of sight of the street. He tried to figure how the Boss would play it.

[*Turn To Page 96*]

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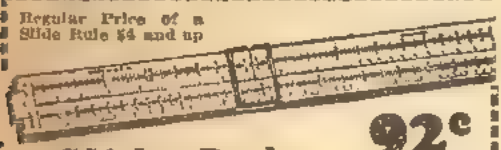

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Outright planned violence against Graves and his daughter could boomerang. They were both liked and respected in the town. Logan might overplay his hand. Larry built a quirly and stopped thinking

THE PRESS clattered away. The stack of the special edition mounted. And then it happened with the approaching dawn already blue gray at the windows. The front door was slammed open just as Graves stepped into the office. It was Milo Fast himself.

"I want Sid Polk for the killing of Henry Renner out in Little Coyote Valley!" he bawled. "I'm a special deputy!" He tapped the badge on his shirt.

Peering around the door frame, Larry Polk saw it. Realized Boss Logan hand-picked town marshal had been forced to deputize him. Realized too that Fast and his men had probably slain Renner out there in the valley.

"Wh-what?" Graves gasped. "Sid killed—"

"That's right!" Fast yelled back. "Where is he? Do I have to shoot up the place?"

Larry Polk saw the game. It was a slick one. If they could grab Sid, associated with Graves, on a murder charge, it would make Graves himself look crooked. It would invalidate anything he might say or print. And, glancing beyond Fast out the front window, Larry saw the shadowy figures of some of the Boss' bunch across the road. After Sid was arrested, in the excitement, they could

rush the place, destroy the copies of the special edition and break up the press.

"Where is he?" Fast bawled again, keyed up, voice a little thick with liquor.

And Larry, wearing the printer's apron, swung through the doorway, hand on his gun butt under it. Fast took him for Sid at first.

"Come along, you dirty killer!" Fast started. "We have witnesses. You killed Renner and—" Then he saw it was Larry.

His drawn gun whipped up. Larry's hand shot up from the holster. Fast's smudges of eyes seemed to sink into his head. He triggered. But Larry's shot came a split second before. Fast's bullet ripped through the flesh of Sid's left shoulder, momentarily pinning him back against the wall behind him. Larry's bullet had hit Milo Fast in the side, half spinning him. Lurching half bent, Fast cursed fiercely. Then his nerve ran out on him.

He turned and threw himself out the front door. Larry absolutely relentless now, went after him. Jessie called to him to stop. But Larry knew it had to be finished. He got onto the sidewalk. Fast was going up the middle of the road. He turned and fired twice frantically. Larry ran after him. Fast was staggering. He turned again, went slaunchwise in the gunman's crouch. Larry closed. Then he and Fast fired simultaneously. Fast's bullet went by Larry's head. And Larry Polk's slug ripped open the trigger slammer's chest.

Fast went up as if lifted, back on his heels, rocking. The red patch bloomed on his chest like a great blossom, then he caved in like a thing of sawdust and went down in the alkali, never to stir again. Larry wheeled. One hurried shot had been flung his way from the shadowy figures lurking across the road. Larry triggered at one of them. The gent dived into an alley. And then the rest of them were skulking off, seeking their holes, fleeing. They'd seen their gun ace killed and they knew the game was up as townsmen began to appear on the road, drawn by the uproar.

Larry walked unsteadily back toward the *Ledger* office. Jessie ran to him and clutched him, half sobbing and half laughing with relief...

IT WAS A half hour later. He sat in a chair in the newspaper office, shoulder freshly bound up by the local sawbones. The street seethed with people who were grabbing at the special edition exposing Boss Logan that was stacked in the doorway. Word had already come that the Boss had been seen fleeing Red Lode. But Larry Polk knew the Law would pick him up when it went into action. The Boss had as good as convicted himself now.

Larry dumped down the rest of the redeye in the tin cup on the desk before him. He looked down ruefully at the blood stains on the printer's apron laying beside his chair. Then he looked up at Jessie. Her eyes glowed liquidly with admiration for his nerve. He knew now he loved her. And he knew that if he put out his hand, that if he said the word, she would be his out of pure gratitude. Then he noticed that Sid, standing beside her, held one of her hands. And he realized then that his hunchbacked cousin was deeply in love with Jessie and she with him.

Old Graves, bustling about, chortled, "Red Lode has been cleaned up at last. But it wouldn't have been if it weren't for you, Larry."

Larry closed his eyes to shut out the sight of Jessie Graves as he nodded. "Yep, I reckon so... And it'll be too danged quiet now. In a few days, I think I'll hit the trail..."

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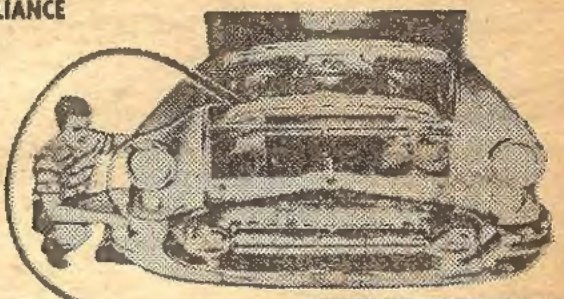

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—Continued from Back Cover

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